EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES OF LEARNER INVOLVEMENT IN TRANSFORMING TRADITIONAL SCHOOL POLICIES AND PRACTICES AT A FORMER MODEL C SCHOOL

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Declaration

By submitting this thesis, I declare that the entirety of the work contained herein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author hereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication hereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third-party rights, and that I have not submitted it previously in its entirety or in part for obtaining any qualification.

..... June 2020.....
Dayne Williams Date

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The opportunity to have studied, researched, and written the words that have culminated into this study I owe entirely to my heavenly Father.

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Abstract

Transformation is a word that has a significant and varied sense of meaning throughout South Africa. However, at its core, transformation is about movement and change. This desire for change leaves no area of civil society untouched, as illustrated by the power of the student voice in matters of social justice. From lecture halls at tertiary institutions to the classrooms at secondary schools in our country, change and movement seemingly are an inevitable and necessary part of development in our country.

This study aimed to explore the attempts of one school to bring about transformation through collaboration between learners and educators. This aim was achieved by giving a voice to the educators who had been employed and active in the events leading to significant learner-led policy changes during the 2016 academic year.

Based on a review of the literature and approached from a social constructivist framework, this study was used to explore the findings gathered during individual interviews and a focus group discussion. Data were then transcribed and analysed to identify five prominent themes, namely the perceptions of transformation in former Model C schools, the inclusion of civic educational elements, positioning student voices, educators' experiences of the student voice, and acknowledging educators' voices.

The research findings suggest that the provision of student voice opportunities in schools provides the means to negotiate issues of transformation better. In addition, these opportunities serve to develop adolescent identity while educating learners to become functional members of a democratic society. Consequently, the potential for power imbalances between learners and educators because of growing entitlement may exist. However, the data linking these imbalances with perceived growing learner entitlement were inconclusive.

Finally, the findings suggest that a sufficient level of management is required when allocating responsibilities such as the management of SVOs to educators, as failure to do so can lead to overburdened teachers and consequential adverse effects on teaching and learning.

Keywords: student/learner voice, student voice opportunities, educator's voice, learner-led policy change

Opsomming

Transformasie is ‘n woord wat ‘n belangrike en uiteenlopende sin vir betekenis regdeur Suid-Afrika het. In die kern daarvan gaan transformasie egter oor beweging en verandering. Hierdie begeerte vir verandering laat geen terrein van die burgerlike samelewing onaangeraak nie, soos geïllustreer deur die mag van studente se stem in aangeleenthede van sosiale geregtigheid. Van lesingsale by tersiêre instellings tot klaskamers by sekondêre skole in ons land is verandering en beweging oënskynlik ‘n onafwendbare en nodige deel van ontwikkeling in ons land.

Hierdie studie het beoog om pogings van een skool om transformasie deur samewerking tussen leerders en opvoeders te bewerkstellig, te ondersoek. Hierdie doel is bereik deur ‘n stem te gee aan die opvoeders wat aangestel en aktief was in die gebeure wat gedurende die 2016 akademiese jaar deur leerders gelei is en tot belangrike beleidsveranderinge gelei het.

Gebaseer op ‘n oorsig van die literatuur en benader vanuit ‘n sosiaal-konstruktivistiese raamwerk, is hierdie studie gebruik om die bevindings wat gedurende individuele onderhoude en ‘n fokusgroepbespreking versamel is, te ondersoek. Data is eers getranskribeer en ontleed om vyf prominente temas te identifiseer, naamlik die persepsies van transformasie in voormalige Model C-skole, die insluiting van burgerlike opvoedingselemente, posisionering van stemme van studente, opvoeders se ervarings van die studente-stem, en die erkenning van opvoeders se stemme.

Die navorsingsbevindings suggereer dat die voorsiening van geleenthede vir die stem van studente in skole die wyse daarstel om aangeleenthede van transformasie beter te onderhandel. Boonop dien hierdie geleenthede om die identiteit van adolessente te ontwikkel terwyl leerders opgevoed word om funksionele lede van ‘n demokratiese gemeenskap te word. Gevolglik mag die potensiaal vir magsewewig tussen leerders en opvoeders as gevolg van groeiende aanspraak bestaan. Gegewens wat hierdie wanbalanse met waargenome groeiende aanspraak van leerders verbind, was egter nie afdoende nie.

Laastens suggereer die bevindings dat ‘n voldoende vlak van bestuur benodig word wanneer verantwoordelikhede soos die bestuur van VSR’s aan opvoeders toegeken word, omdat versuim om dit te doen tot oorlaaide onderwysers en gevolglike ongunstige effekte op onderrig en leer kan lei.

Sleutelwoorde: stem van studente/leerders, geleenthede vir stemme van studente, opvoeders se stem, beleidsverandering gelei deur leerders

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1.1 Introduction

South Africa has experienced a challenging period of transformation in recent years. Politically charged protests focusing on service delivery, poverty alleviation, and access to and transformation of educational institutions have occurred with consistent regularity. According to socio-political activists and the media, educational protests specifically have been fuelled by the development of learners' and parents' frustrations because of the unwillingness of educational institutions to accommodate the diverse needs and challenges experienced by their changing learner cohort. This study considered how a secondary school was affected by the tug of war between traditional ways of being and the demands introduced by a diverse learner cohort.

South Africa has a long history of learner- and student-driven socio-political activism. However, after 1994, this voice seemed to be silent for a while. In the past decade, media reports have indicated that this voice is being re-energised. During the latter half of the 2010s, the #Feesmustfall movement and protests by learners at affluent Western Cape and Gauteng schools dominated mainstream and social media (Pather, 2016; Mortlock, 2016). As this study was interested in the influence these movements had had on school culture and practises, it focused on school-based activism that saw learners expressing their voice in an effort to challenge the status quo of a former Model C school.

The learners at Parkfield High School (a pseudonym used to maintain anonymity), the school that forms the focus of this study, were persistent in their attempts to challenge what they perceived as discriminatory rules pertaining to how they were allowed to wear their hair and uniforms, as well as some of the relational challenges they experienced in the school. It was interesting to note that the learner-led movement against these practices focused on specific challenges related to the school culture, which prided itself on having a progressive view of transformation while still upholding a traditional ethos and accompanying practices. In addition to the socio-political climate at the time, this movement pointed to the need for schools to engage in authentic inclusive efforts that acknowledge the voice and active participation of learners in transforming their learning spaces. With members of staff, this case study explored their experience of being part of a transformation process at a school that sought to create democratic spaces for engagement among all stakeholders involved in the school. The initial

purpose of creating this transformative space was to put in place mechanisms that would encourage the learner voice to emerge in the process.

While extensive research has been done on the experiences of learners and institutional management teams in these processes (refer to chapter 2), this study seeks to add to the limited body of empirical literature that explores educators' experiences of the processes and outcomes of learner-initiated reforms.

Educators play a critical role in school culture; they are the grassroots implementers of school policy and practice. It is also common knowledge that while educators are tasked with ensuring the implementation of policy, they too often feel that their voice is not acknowledged fully in the process. Therefore, this study sought to create a space for educators' voices to emerge and, in doing so, add to the growing body of knowledge pertaining to educators' experiences of learner-led policy change.

I argue that because educators are central to teaching and learning and are often tasked with being the gatekeepers of traditional practices and policies at schools, they play a pivotal role in ensuring sustainable transformation in schools. In Chapter 2, these roles and transformation in the South African context are explored in greater detail.

1.2 Background and Context

South Africa has a history of violation of human rights and discrimination that has wound its way into every sphere of civil society (Carter & May, 1999; Wilson, 2001). Many of the challenges our country is experiencing currently are considered the remnants of unjust laws and practices that privileged the values and development of one race over another. In 2015, a series of student-led protests occurred at the University of Cape Town that led to the establishment of the #Rhodesmustfall (RMF) movement. According to Nyamnjoh (2017), this movement was born out of students' frustration with the slow pace of transformation, ongoing systemic racism, and resistance to the decolonisation of South African universities. The aforementioned has resulted in many students in institutions of higher learning continuing to feel alienated or marginalised at their institutions (Nyamnjoh, 2017). One month after the RMF movement had begun their demonstrations, the statue of Cecil John Rhodes was toppled from the steps of the University of Cape Town. This symbolic gesture is believed to have triggered the resurgence of student voice power through social and political activism. According to Pillay (2015), this awakening sense of student power permeated the corridors of universities across South Africa.

The ripple effect of this movement was not restricted to the halls of universities but extended throughout South African society and into its secondary schools. Empowered by student movements in higher education, policy change became a topic at the forefront of educational institutions around the country as learners started to challenge the status quo regarding age-old systemic structures. At the time, an increasing number of incidents of secondary school learners resisting school rules and policies were reported in the media (Mahlangu, 2017).

The importance of understanding the greater political climate of South Africa lies in what Bronfenbrenner (1977) refers to as the bio-ecological model. This model outlines the necessity of observing individuals as part of a series of systems that influence each other in different ways (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Härkönen, 2007). Events do not occur in a vacuum but rather are tied inextricably to interactions well beyond the immediate phenomenon. This is of particular relevance to this study, which views schools as a microcosm of society, within which an infinite number of interactions between key stakeholders exist. At times, the way in which these interactions were negotiated led to a surge in political or social activism among learners and educators. An example of this is an incident at a secondary school in Pretoria where black learners made multiple allegations relating to racial abuse and victimisation that included, amongst others, strict hair rules that appeared to restrict the way in which black girls wear their hair (Harris, Nupen & Malebatsi, 2016). While the validity of these claims was not the focus of this research project, they serve as a backdrop to the underlying volatility experienced at many secondary schools, particularly those previously classified as House of Assembly schools or, as they are more commonly known, former Model C schools (Soudien & Sayed, 2003).

Model C is a defunct term that is still used informally today to refer to schools that were reserved previously for use by white people during Apartheid. Today, many of these schools are slowly beginning to reflect the racial demographics of the South African population; however, in many cases, the policies and practices have not changed to make provision for a more diverse learner body.

The research site for this study was Parkfield High School. This school was once classified as a Model C school and caters for learners between grades eight and twelve. This school prides itself on having a history of active demographic engagement with learners and strives to create a space that allows input regarding the rules and policies that govern the school. It actively seeks to encourage learners' voices about matters that may be of concern to them or that are highlighted in social justice discourse. The school uniform and dress code, often a very

contentious and alienating issue in South African schools, became the critical focus of educators, pupils, and management at about the same time when the #Feesmustfall movement was gaining momentum. Learners at the school-initiated dialogue that reviewed school policies pertaining to school uniform, how hair may be worn, and the wearing of jewellery at school. By doing so they thus sought to challenge the entrenched practices and traditions of a school with a well-established and traditional hierarchal system. The outcome of this dialogue led to the amendment of policies with a view to minimizing the perceived gender inequality expressed by the learners. Therefore boys were able to grow their hair and wear earrings alongside their female counterparts. In addition the uniform rules were also adjusted giving the learners more freedom in choosing the uniform most fitting their personal gender identity.

In South Africa, the School Governing Body (SGB) of a school usually determines these policies. SGBs are statutory bodies that are tasked with creating a space for all stakeholders to have a say in the policies, management, and practices of a school. However, despite these statutory guidelines, this governance structure is often perceived as a potential barrier for continuing traditional school culture and practices that do not always promote inclusivity or transformation.

Parkfield High School was confronted by a learner cohort that had re-discovered their socio-political voices. Instead of repressing this voice, the school decided to embrace it and attempted to manage the process.

1.3 Motivation for the Research

While the experience of this school is by no means unique in the context of South Africa, limited empirical research has been conducted about the ramifications of these and similar policy changes for teaching, learning, and educator-learner relations.

In addition, adolescents search for their sense of self and identity through their social interactions (McLeod, 2014). This includes the questioning of value and belief systems, which are largely influenced and embedded within the schooling systems they occupy. Thus, it follows that, through opportunities in which to express their voices, adolescents are able question and make sense of the world around them.

The findings of this study drew on existing theoretical frameworks developed by Erikson (1963), Marcia (1980), and Waterman (1984) in an attempt to understand adolescent identity

formation and consequently examine the potential contribution of student voice opportunities in identity development.

Furthermore, the importance of this study has potentially significant contributions to make in the field of educational psychology. Systemic factors that influence identity formation have a strong bearing on an adolescents' wellbeing and ability to learn optimally. Linked to this are the challenges of transformation and creating a sense of belonging for all learners which continues to be problematic in the South African context. As educational psychologists bound by a moral and ethical obligation to work in the best interest of learners, it is necessary to explore the means by which schools strive to attain socially inclusive environments.

1.4 Research Focus and Questions

The focus of this study was to explore and describe how the educators at Parkfield High School, a former Model C school, experienced the learner-led policy changes that resulted in the reformation of school rules. To achieve this aim, a space was created in which these experiences could be shared and reflected on. Additionally, it was hoped that by doing so, greater insight into the effectiveness, viability, and sustainability of the platforms and mechanisms used to navigate the transformation of well-established school policies might be developed.

To this end, the study was guided by the following research question: **How did the educators at the school experience the learners' involvement in changing some of the school's policies and practices?**

The following sub questions were used to guide the exploration of educators' experiences and perceptions:

- How did educators experience the emergent learner voice initially?
- What role did educators play in managing learner activism?
- Did educators feel that their voice was acknowledged fully in the policy changes that were adopted eventually?
- What effect did the policy changes have on teaching and learning (TAL)?
- What effect did the policy changes have on educator-learner relations?

- Having gone through this experience at their school, what were educators' views on their responsibility to provide spaces in which the learners' voice was heard?

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study reflected on the experiences of the educators who were employed at Parkfield High School during 2016 and 2017. During that time, the school underwent a process of policy review that was well publicised and resulted in the adoption of new guidelines regarding hair, uniform, and jewellery (Goba, 2017; Qukula, 2016).

Whilst these may appear superficial at first glance, in this context, these are highly contentious and politicised issues closely related to the paradigm of inclusive education. Furthermore, it can be argued that the acknowledgement of diverse socio-cultural practices and efforts to address potential imbalances can be considered an issue of social justice. It is important to note that the specific policies outlined in this study are not the focus but rather stand as an example of learner-led policy change and the subsequent response of educators to its implementation.

Finally, this study sought to explore the aforementioned processes from the perspective of some of the educators who were directly involved in the process. It is important to note that in focusing on the voices of these educators, this study by no means wishes to minimise the experiences of other stakeholders.

1.6 Research Design and Methodology

1.6.1 Paradigm

A paradigm may be viewed as a set of basic beliefs that represents a world view for its holder and that shapes the way in which one determines the nature of the world, the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships that occurs within it (Babbie, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Willig & Rogers, 2017). This manifests across three dimensions, namely ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Ontology refers to the nature of the reality that will be studied. Epistemology is the consideration of knowing when knowledge is valid or what constitutes truth, while methodology refers to the way in which the researcher attains more knowledge about the unknown, with the aim of increasing the body of knowledge in question (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000).

This study was situated in the social constructivist paradigm, as it sought to explore the realities of individual teachers' experiences and how those influenced their professional lives. This

approach implies that identities are not fixed but rather arise from people's experiences and the meanings that people attach to them (Jacklin, 2001).

Therefore, a social constructivist approach takes the ontological stance that individuals' efforts to understand reality are influenced by the subjective meanings they attach to their experiences, and the goal of research within such a paradigm is to engage with participants' views of a situation (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Furthermore, this approach acknowledges the innate ability of individuals to reflect on their own lives and looks to this as a deeply valuable source of knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Damons, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

By listening and making sense of the educator's stories in a collaborative and relational process during the current research, social constructivism also allowed the researcher to explore the epistemological stance that meaning is co-constructed between the researcher and the participants (Keaton & Bodie, 2011). This stance holds that making meaning is made richer by respecting and ensuring the active involvement of participants and the acknowledgment that the relationship between the researcher and the participants are linked inextricably (Yilmaz, 2013). In addition, Patton (2015) cautions the researcher to be more concerned with deeply understanding specific cases in a particular context as opposed to hypothesising about generalisations. This aligned with the purpose of this study, as it sought to explore the specific experiences of educators in the unique and dynamic context of education in post-Apartheid South Africa.

1.6.2 Research design

A qualitative research approach was utilised for this study, as it is concerned not only with the "physical events and behaviour taking place, but also in how the participants in the study make sense of these" (Maxwell, 2008, p. 221). By means of observations and interviews, qualitative research focuses on the description and understanding of participant's experiences as captured in their own words. The emphasis of this study was on *how* the context in which the teachers found themselves might have influenced their actions, interactions and/or the meaning that they ascribed to their experiences (Yilmaz, 2013).

Furthermore, a case study design was chosen, as it complements the ideals of the social constructivist paradigm. According to Creswell (2014), using a case study research design involves the study of a phenomenon using one or more cases within a 'bounded' system . In this study, the bounded system formed part of a contextual landscape that included the political

environment in the wake of the #Feesmustfall and #Rhodesmustfall movements and the school as the setting in which the phenomenon under study occurred. Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 39) describe the case study design as an intensive description and exploration of the "unit of analysis", which in this study constitutes the experiences of the teachers. Thus, this design was congruent with my aim to draw knowledge from the lived experiences of several teachers at the school. Parkfield High School was chosen as the site of the case study because of the well-publicised policy reforms that were undertaken there late in 2016 (Etheridge, 2016; Goba, 2017). The school is a former Model C school and is currently classified as a Quintile 5 school. Quintile 5 schools are considered the most economically independent and therefore receive less financial assistance from the government. Currently, all South African public schools are categorised into five groups according to their economic capacity and the South African Government uses these categories to allocate financial resources (WCED, 2013). Popular discourse indicates that schools in this quintile often assume more leeway in deciding their school-based policies.

1.6.3 Sampling

The sampling of participants refers to a series of decisions that I as the researcher had to make regarding when and where to observe, whom to talk to, or what data sources to focus on (Maxwell, 2008). For the purposes of this study I chose to utilise purposive sampling, which is a strategy in which specific settings or people are selected deliberately, as they can provide important information that cannot be obtained as well from other choices (Marshall, 1996; Palinkas et al., 2015). This will be elaborated on in Chapter 3.

The sample for this study was six individuals. The individuals who agreed to participate in the individual interviews were invited to participate in the focus group discussion (FGD), and all six accepted. It is important to note the process that led to a final sample size of six individuals. In qualitative research, an adequate sample size is considered one that sufficiently answers the research question and that is large enough to capture a range of experiences but not so large as to be repetitive (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). I am of the view that the sample size decided upon was adequate to achieve data saturation.

1.6.4 Recruitment

Participants for the individual interviews and focus group discussion were drawn from a pool of full-time educators who were at the school during the 2016 and 2017 school years. The recruitment process is outlined below.

I shared the research focus of the study with the headmaster of the school, who in turn obtained permission from the governing body of the school for me to contact potential participants. Having been employed at the research site previously, I had an established knowledge of various educators' perspectives and their roles in the school. This enabled me to identify potential participants who were then invited by means of a confidential and encrypted email with an information sheet attached outlining the focus and scope of the study. From those who expressed interest in response to the invitation, a list of possible participants was finalised. The participants were then selected purposefully considering gender, age, racial diversity, teaching, and managerial experience. I hoped that by doing this, I would be able to select a varied sample of educators in which to create a space for rich and diverse views to emerge. After potential participants had been selected and had confirmed their willingness to participate in the study, I met with each of them to review the research focus, address any questions they might have had, and obtain their written informed consent for their participation in the study (see Appendix F).

1.6.5 Data collection

The data for this study were generated by means of semi-structured individual interviews, a focus group discussion, and research field notes.

As this study valued the experiences of the teachers, I was of the view that individual interviews offered a sensitive and empathetic means to obtain individuals' stories. The semi-structured individual interviews contained predetermined, open-ended questions designed to encourage free thought and exploration. In this way, the conversation was able to flow into meaningful dialogue while preventing transgression into areas that were not of significant relevance (Babbie, 2015; Rossetto, 2014; Seidman, 2019). In-depth interviews are well suited to studies that have an interest in the experience of others and the meaning they construct from that experience (Seidman, 2019).

A focus group involves having discussions with a small group of people who may share a similar or mutual experience. The method provides a platform that affords the participants an opportunity to respond to the researcher's questions and engage with other participants in a

group setting where a narrative can be co-constructed (Barbour. 2018; Krueger, 2014; Liamputtong, 2011). In addition, this method provided me with an opportunity to gather information from multiple sources in one session.

As qualitative research is an iterative process, it requires constant reviewing of one's processes through a willingness to reflect, revise, and adapt. By doing so, I was able to remain open to various ways of thinking and engaging with the material. During this study, this process was particularly prominent when new topics or issues were highlighted or discussed during the initial interviews (Barbour, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This was important, as it added to the validity and credibility of the data.

Field notes are pivotal as a means of documenting contextual information that enables others to confirm or corroborate the results. In addition, it provides an audit trail that documents all the research decisions and activities to illustrate how the data were collected, recorded, and interpreted (Anney. 2014; Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Silverman, 2016). The field notes collected during this study are secured and encrypted on the author's home computer.

The interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the interviewees. In addition, I made handwritten notes during the FGDs. All audio-recording were transcribed verbatim before being entered into the NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Any identifying information such as names of participants or other people they mentioned during audio-recorded data collection was removed to maintain anonymity. Identifying information related to the school was removed and a code was attributed to ensure anonymity.

1.6.6 Data analysis

According to Harding and Whitehead, qualitative data analysis is the "formal interpretation of collected data to create order, elicit meaning and communicate findings" (2013, p. 142). To meet these outcomes, the data were first transcribed verbatim to ensure close alignment with the participants actual words.

After transcription of the individual interviews, the data were coded and analysed by means of the NVivo qualitative data analysis software. This approach allowed the identification of consistent and rich themes during the individual interviews, which were then used to inform the FGD. Data analysis by means of the NVivo software is explained more thoroughly in Chapter 3.

After the FGD had been transcribed, the data were captured by means of the NVivo software before being coded using a thematic analysis approach. This approach constitutes a method of analysis that "minimally organises and describes your data set in rich detail" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6).

Relationships between coded data were then explored, and clusters of linked codes were grouped into thematic themes. This was important, as it assisted in differentiating codes that appeared infrequently or lacked substantial support from those that appeared repeatedly and thus formed the basis for the emerging themes.

All audio-recorded data, field notes, and transcripts were stored on a password-protected computer, which can be accessed only by the lead investigator. This information will be stored for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

1.7 Ensuring Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a term used to describe the various approaches by which the quality of data in a study can be measured. Three methods commonly used to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research and adopted for this study are discussed in Chapter 3. The following represents a brief outline of each:

- **Triangulation:** Triangulation involves combining two or more data sources, investigators, methodologic approaches, or theoretical perspectives (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Kornbluh, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009). The data sources included data collected during the individual semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussion.

- **Code-recode strategy**: This involves the researcher coding the same data twice with an interval of several weeks in between (Anney, 2014). The coded items can then be compared with one another to examine any differences or discrepancies that may be present (Anney, 2014; Chilisa & Preece, 2005).

- **Reflexivity**: Reflexivity is a process in which researchers actively reflects on the epistemology of themselves, their audience, and the participants with a view of obtaining a richer understanding of perceptions and their possible influence on the research process (Patton, 2015).

1.8 Ethical Considerations

As an educational psychologist in training, I am bound by the ethical principles of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA, 2008). According to the HPCSA (2008), ethics can be defined as moral principles or standards that must be met and maintained. The principles of confidentiality and informed consent, autonomy, and beneficence were considered, as they related to this study.

The ethical principle of confidentiality was adhered to in the process of selecting participants. All participants were informed in detail about the nature of the study *before* consent forms were issued (Allan, 2016). In this way, potential participants were aware of the nature and purpose of this study so that they were able to make informed choices. This was further recognised through the principle of autonomy, which occurs when the participant's right to make his/her own informed choices is acknowledged and respected (Allan, 2016). For this reason, participants were reminded that, should they wish to withdraw from the study, they would be able to do so at any stage; consequently, any data collected from them would be destroyed.

The third ethical principle is that of beneficence, which required an active commitment to conduct my research in a way that protected the welfare and rights of those involved during and after the study (Allan, 2016; Jacob, Decker, & Lugg, 2016). It should be noted that no unforeseen challenges were identified during the research process.

As my research took place in a government school, the utmost care was taken to ensure confidentiality of the institution and all participants. To ensure this, all data generated were entered into an electronic database using the NVivo software platform. The generated data forms, interview and FGD transcripts, and notes were then coded to ensure that no potentially identifying information relating to the participants or the institute was present. As the names of several learners arose during the discussions, those names were also coded to protect the learners' identities.

Finally, access to the data was restricted to the author and supervisor of the study. All files were password protected on the author's computer, including transcriptions, audio recordings, questionnaires, and case notes.

1.9 Conclusion

In Chapter 1, I have attempted to introduce the composition of the research project by offering a brief overview of its theoretical underpinnings. I undertook to explore the political and historical context of the study and attempted to identify the motivation and potential benefits of such a study. The ontological, epistemological, and methodological stances were then explored against the context of a qualitative study from within the social constructivist paradigm. This served to align the research design with the specific approaches adopted in the study. The chapter then provided a summation of the various decisions regarding research design and methodology that were made during the research process, as well as a consideration of the validity of the study. The latter was achieved through various efforts to strengthen the trustworthiness, including triangulation, the code-recode strategy, and reflexivity. Finally, an examination of the ethical considerations was outlined. These areas will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 3.

1.10 Chapter Division

Chapter 1 introduces the research study by explaining the motivation and background for the study and gives an overview of what the study entailed. This chapter includes the research focus and provides a brief overview of the research paradigm, design, and methodology used for the study.

Chapter 2 provides an in-depth literature review of various identified themes, including the emergence and importance of the student voice in the South African context, an exploration of the covert curriculum as manifested through civic education, an examination of the role of educators and institutions to provide education beyond the formalised curriculum, an overview of key theories pertaining to adolescent identity formation, and lastly, a review of the literature pertaining to educators' reflections and experiences.

Chapter 3 addresses the research paradigm, approach, design, and methodology for the study. In this chapter, I also discuss the mechanisms used to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. In addition, the ethical considerations, practices, and dilemmas that I encountered are discussed.

Chapter 4 addresses the research findings. The findings are presented by means of direct quotations, categories, and themes that emerged during the data-analysis process.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the research study. An integrative discussion of the findings and interpretations of the participants' experiences are presented in this chapter. I also reflect on the limitations of the study and make recommendations for future research.

1.11 Key Terms

1.11.1 Student/learner voice

The concept of the 'student voice' relates to the acknowledgement of unique power and knowledge that students possess and that adults cannot fully replicate (Levin 1998; Mitra, 2004). In its simplest form, student voices consist of youths being given the opportunity to share their opinions of problems and potential solutions among themselves or with adults to address identified problems (Mitra, 2004). In this study, the term 'student' refers to youths studying at a tertiary level, for instance at universities. The term 'learners' is used to describe youths in a secondary institution such as a high school. However, the terms 'student voice' or 'student voice opportunities' are applicable to both students and learners.

1.11.2 Student voice opportunities (SVOs)

These refer to the structures, platforms, and/or procedures that are put in place at a systemic level in an institution that gives its members (secondary or tertiary) an opportunity to express themselves in a safe and constructive environment. While these structures are overseen by educators, they are driven by the learner or student body.

1.11.3 Educator voice

The educator voice refers to the views, opinions, and conceptual frames from which educators conduct their work (Jessop & Penny, 1998). According to Hargreaves (2000), educators are the ultimate key to educational reform; therefore, their voice must be considered if educational change and school improvement are to have lasting value. In this research project, the educator voice was empowered to reflect and explore how institutional changes had been experienced.

1.11.4 Learner-led policy change

This refers to specific school rules or policies that have been amended or reviewed because of the active involvement of learners across various platforms.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The role of South African educators is multifaceted and complex. Educational contexts often become the space in which learners explore the various ways in which they wish to navigate the world. Through their influence and proximity, educators regularly find themselves as facilitators in this process. This is not unique to South Africa, and a great deal of research and knowledge exists about the variables that influence learner identity formation and pedagogic principles in relation to democratic citizenry (Castro & Knowles, 2017; Crick, 2017; Torney-Purta, 2002).

Current curriculum and school governance policies seek to create spaces in which learners can acquire the skills and experience needed for meaningful participation in society. However, according to Van der Berg, Spaull, Wills, Gustafsson and Kotzé (2016), many schools continue to experience challenges in this regard. As this study aimed to understand the experiences of educators who endeavoured to create and facilitate spaces for learners, it was necessary to explore what the literature says about various related topics in educational discourse. Civic education, teachers' roles and responsibilities, and the importance of providing platforms for the student voice all formed part of this enquiry. In addition, it was important to position adolescents in terms of their identify formation, as this provided a theoretical framework from which to view their development. For this reason, Erik Erikson's (1963) psychosocial theory of development was drawn on.

Furthermore, in recent years, extensive research regarding the challenges of schools as inclusive spaces have been undertaken (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, & Van Deventer, 2016; Naicker & Naicker, 2018). While exploring many of these challenges, it became apparent that few studies have endeavoured to explore inclusive spaces from the perspective of educators functioning with an established modus operandi. As such, this enquiry provided a possibility of examining interesting and relevant challenges still in need of addressing.

It is my firm belief that while international studies can provide some insight into how to navigate these challenges, it is important for South Africans to make a greater contribution to this conversation, particularly as it relates to the South African context. History and the transformation journey play a critical role in understanding the nuanced variables that continue

to present challenges in transforming the organisational and cultural factors that affect the way in which communities, schools, educators, and learners change.

This chapter attempts to offer a holistic conceptualisation of the various discussion points relevant to this study. With this in mind, the matter of student/learner voices, boundaries of curriculum, and the roles and responsibilities of teachers formed part of this enquiry. To this end, both South African and international literature was considered.

2.2 The Student Voice: Historical Context and Challenges

The use of the term 'student voice' is accepted widely as being an advent of educational discourse in the early part of the 21st century (Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding & McGregor, 2005). Holdsworth suggests that the student voice in education can be described as "a legitimate perspective and opinion, being present and taking part, and/or having an active role in decisions about the implementation of educational policies and practice" (2000, p. 355).

The concept of student-led political activism is well established throughout the world (Boren, 2019; Luescher-Mamashela, 2015; Rhoads, 2016). In the South African context, it is a field of politics with deep meaning inextricably tied to the struggle for democracy in the face of political oppression. Ndlovu (2006) cites the student uprisings of June 16th, 1976, in Soweto as an example of the importance of acknowledging the voice of the youth in education and societal matters. On that day in 1976, students mobilised resistance against the introduction of Afrikaans as the language of instruction in state schools (Brown, 2016; Kruger, 2017). It is estimated that more than 170 school children lost their lives that afternoon. To this day, the harrowing image of Hector Pieterson being carried by fellow student Mbuyisa Makhuba is considered a stark reminder of the willingness of the Apartheid regime to go to great lengths to suppress the student voice. Forty years since the Soweto uprising, much has changed in the South African landscape; however, the student voice and the power it yields remains an influential force. This is particularly apparent in the recent wave of student protests, which the media and political analysts attribute to a growing dissatisfaction among learners and students frustrated with the slow pace of transformation and reform in educational institutions. According to Fataar (2018), the consequence of the aforementioned dissatisfaction led to the collective drive to decolonise education in Southern Africa. Through this movement, the call for free education and an explicit need for change in the composition of knowledge and curricula spoke to the desire of students to witness change that reflected their "emerging African-centred humanness" (Fataar, 2018, p. 1).

This desire for change is not exclusive to tertiary institutes but rather extends to South Africa's secondary learners. Lebeloane suggests that the issue is perpetuated by the fact that "the South African school curriculum does little to address decolonization for equity and social justice in the South African public schools" (2017, p. 1). I am of the view that to address the needs of learners and students, it is important to also examine the relational practices that exist between learners and those in positions of power, such as the educators. According to the literature, these relationships are often complex and challenging. Mannion (2007) shares the view that many adults, particularly those involved in providing opportunities for the student voice carry assumptions that young people are irrational or unable to grasp their experiences to a sufficient enough extent to warrant any real value to their voice. Cook-Sather (2002, p. 4) concurs with this view by suggesting, "The twin challenges of authorizing student perspectives are (1) changing the structures in our minds that have rendered us disinclined to elicit and attend to students' voices and (2) changing the structures in educational relationships and institutions that have supported and been supported by this disinclination." In essence, this seems to suggest reluctance, whether intentional or not, to shift the way in which educators view adolescents; in addition, it suggests that these discourses may exist at a systemic level where they may reinforce educators' views and in turn are reinforced by the educators in a self-perpetuating cycle.

In the South African context, these relational issues are compounded further by the complexity of socio-economic inequality. Shalem and Hoadley (2009) suggest that economic and social capital are two aspects that directly affect the ease with which educators are able to accomplish the social and cognitive aims of the school curriculum. This suggests that schools with greater physical resources, functional management teams, and supportive parental bodies are better equipped to achieve the desired outcomes of the institution. Ball (2003) illustrates that the move by schools to favour increasingly what he describes as "external contingencies" (p. 217) is not a new phenomenon. This points to the growing tendency of schools to focus on indicators of performance such as overall pass rates and performance on the annual national assessments rather than on the development of the social capital of educators and learners and educator-learner relationships. It is interesting to note that in the face of this performance-driven discourse, the youth again find themselves at the forefront of social movements for change.

2.3 Traditions and Voice: A Social Constructivist Approach

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a social construct as "an idea that has been created and accepted by the people in a society" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In this section, I set out to

establish a conceptual framework from which to consider school policies, rules, traditions, and how the way in which they are understood may influence the educational landscape. It is important that we do this, as any thorough exploration of educators' experiences requires an understanding of the social constructs contributing to the environment in which educators find themselves.

The notion of 'voice' as a social construct is well established. McLaren suggests that the student voice is "a constitutive force that both mediates and shapes reality within historically constructed practices and relationships" (2007, p. 243). This view aligns with the social constructivist view that "the very terms by which people perceive and describe the world, including language, are social artefacts" (Speece & Keogh, 1996, p. 1991; Aljohani, 2017; Koschut, 2018). Furthermore, according to Marsen (2008), attaching meaning to social artefacts, relationships, and one's sense of self, whether physical or otherwise, is a central trait of human beings. I concur with this view and have found that educators and learners construct meaning from their unique experiences in the school context. Furthermore, this is influenced greatly by the particular social artefacts present in the schools they attend. Potential for tension between management, educators, and learners exists when schools, particularly those with a long and established history, are perceived to remain strongly influenced by the beliefs and values of previous generations. How these are experienced on a daily basis will evolve over time as learners develop a sense of what Freire (2000) describes as critical consciousness, which awakens them to identify and take action against what they may perceive as oppressive practices (Maseko, 2018; Mustakova-Possardt, 2003). One could consider the learner activism that has compelled many former Model C schools across the country to review the systemic structures, policies and/or traditions that are appearing to hinder social change in post-Apartheid South Africa, to be indicative of this (Chisholm, 2004). Many of these traditions and practices were associated closely with a time in the history of South Africa when colonialism, Apartheid and race dictated the distribution of resources, the composition of the student body, the underlying ethos, and curriculum delivery modalities at schools (Fiske & Ladd, 2004).

However, Wray, Hellenberg, and Jansen (2018) suggest that, no matter how problematic traditions may appear, they afford us an opportunity to identify with and become part of something greater than ourselves. Furthermore, they share the view that traditions may serve to remind us that we are a part of a wider community that goes beyond our personal individual needs. While I concur with this view, I think it is important for schools to review their historical traditions and to work towards aligning them with new and inclusive traditions that reflect the

demographics of the broader stakeholder community. Schools then have the potential to establish themselves as transformative spaces that encourage the dynamic emergence of inclusive educational spaces, which in turn supports broader social transformation.

Therefore, it stands to reason that if the fabric of our schools is based on socially constructed paradigms, schools have to be enabling spaces that encourage the youth to find and exercise their voice in collaboration with adults, policy, and practice. When a school sets out to encourage the emergence of the learner voice, it paves the way for the ideas and thoughts of a new generation, to challenge the status quo or taken-for-granted practices and in so doing pave the way for the emergence of civic-minded young adults.

2.4 Democratising Education

Educational reform within a democratic space has been a key focus of much research, policy development, and civil society initiatives. Mncube (2008) refers to this reform process as the democratisation of education in South Africa after 1994. This term denotes an effort by the South African government to put in place systems and policies that increasingly sought to engender an educational system that actively seeks to redress past imbalances while remaining accountable to a very diverse cohort of stakeholders and society at large. I concur with the following view:

> An informed and aware population who can participate in political processes, hold the state to account, and exercise rights and responsibilities effectively is widely considered today as indispensable for strengthening the quality of (democratic) governance and the nature of state-society relations. (Menocal, 2014, p. 2)

The literature reminds us, however, that how people choose to exercise their voice is often dynamic, contentious, disruptive, and influenced by unique contextual variables (Menocal, 2014). The South African educational space remains a highly politicised terrain, shaped by often complex contextual variables. Therefore, it is important when trying to make sense of any particular phenomenon related to the educational terrain, that we seek to "unearth the contextual dynamics at play" to find what will work best in a specific space (Menocal, 2014, p. 27). This study set out to explore the dynamics at play via the experiences and insights of educators in policy transformation at a school in the Western Cape of South Africa. However, during the research, it became apparent that, to understand these experiences and insights, one would have to consider the organisational culture of the school and more specifically the power dynamics

embedded in that culture. The challenges to policy were being initiated essentially by learners at the time. In essence, they were challenging a well-established traditional school hierarchical system with well-established practices and perceptions about how things should be done. However, Mncube (2008, p. 77) reminds us that "learners should play a role in policy making and implementation, as they constitute a major stakeholder group".

The school that was the focus of this research was mindful of the need to acknowledge the student voice against the backdrop of a political climate in which students and learners expressed the view that their voices were being silenced or disregarded. To this end, efforts were made to position the learners as key role players in a process of conversations that invited their opinions and perspectives on policy matters. In doing this, they thus set out to re-engage the disengaged student voice (Fleming, 2017; Menocal, 2014; Mncube, 2008).

The literature supports the importance of including students in change management almost from the beginning. Legislation in the form of the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (South Africa, 1996) affords secondary school learners, who are members of the Representative Council for Learners, full participation in the decision-making process of the school governing body (SGB). However, research related to school governance has found that although learners form part of these governance structures, they are rarely afforded the same opportunities to participate, and that important policy decisions continue to be made primarily by the adult members of those committees. However, it is also important to note that even within the adult cohort of these SGBs are perceptions and experiences that not all voices are valued equally (Mncube, 2008).

Recent research findings suggest that teachers often do not feel they are active or valued participants in decision making (Bush & Glover, 2016; Naidoo, 2019). When considering this view in relation to the historical context of education in the country, it is important to take cognisance of the authoritarian and often patriarchal nature of school management. The schooling system we inherited from the Apartheid regime is one based on an authoritarian ideal in which the student voice and often that of the educators were seldom given the space to express their views. Historically, school leadership was viewed as a "microcosm of apartheid governance where the system dictated and the individual complied" (Sibanda, 2017, p. 2). The emergence of the student protest action in recent years, elucidates that despite various statutory changes, the perception exists that schools are not democratic spaces. As we find ourselves edging towards three decades of democracy it is becoming increasingly evident that the aims

and ideals of the South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996 (South Africa, 1996) which states its aim as the "advancement of democratic transformation of society" remains largely aspirational.

Research into inclusive school governance practices suggests that the learner and student voices are particularly effective in drawing attention to issues in novel ways. According to Mitra and Gross (2009) this is because being a high school student differs greatly from being an adult interacting with high school students. In essence, this difference in positionality influences their perceptions of a given situation and thus elicits differing views and opinions.

It should be acknowledged that any expression of the student voice, like those of the educators, comes with a great degree of responsibility (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017; Bishop, 2018). In view of this, I suggest that 'voice ownership' in democratic spaces should be understood in terms of the acknowledgment of the values and responsibilities that sharing one's opinions carries.

The ability to acknowledge and fulfil the responsibility of one's voice is not a trait inherent to individuals but rather is learnt. Thus, I believe the onus is on schools and educators to model these behaviours. According to Finkel (2003), when individuals are trained frequently and take an active part in their own learning, they will be more likely to harbour attitudes favourable toward democracy.

This is supported by Wray et al. (2018), who suggest the responsibility for civic learning lies with schools in allowing young people to share and be listened to. By doing this, the authors suggest that schools prepare students to exist in a society in which they can not only speak out but also engage and listen to views that challenge them.

2.5 Placing Learning into Perspective

Various paradigms of educational learning contribute to our understanding of teaching and learning. They are of great importance, as they provide the theoretical frameworks by which we understand how learners absorb, process, and retain information during the learning process. Furthermore, these learning theories attempt to illustrate the extent to which cognitive, social, emotional, and environmental factors play a part in knowledge acquisition (Pritchard, 2017).

The five prevailing paradigms to contextualise the acquisition of knowledge can be summarised briefly as follows:

Behaviourism is a view primarily concerned with aspects of human behaviour that are observable and measurable. In behaviourism, the ideas of positive and negative reinforcement increase or decrease the likelihood that the learnt behaviour will reoccur. Therefore, learning is viewed as a change in behaviour by the learner (Spencer, 2017).

Cognitivism theory was developed by Jean Piaget and emphasizes "the role of mental activities in the learning process" (Clark, 2018, p. 176). Activities such as thinking, remembering, perceiving, interpreting, reasoning, and problem solving are believed to be learnt through experience and active participation (Clark, 2018).

Constructivism, within the realm of education, states that learners construct their own meaning of the world by incorporating new information into their previously held ideas and experiences. In doing so, learners either choose to discard new information or adapt their previously held beliefs. A central premise to this theory is that learners create their own knowledge rather than having knowledge imposed on them (Sjøberg, 2007).

Humanism is a theory in which the needs and interests of learners are central. It asserts that learning is a natural process that culminates in the learners reaching what Maslow refers to as self-actualisation (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016). This process is influenced by various factors that learners encounter, such as exploring and observing others, role-modelling, and experiences (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016).

Connectivism is a model of learning that has developed alongside the technological strides of the 21st century. According to Siemens (2005), connectivism recognises that learning and knowledge are founded in diversity of opinion and occur through the processing of information by forming connections. This is made increasingly possible by technological innovation, which provides the platforms on which knowledge can be shared with increasing ease.

A review of current educational discourse suggests that traditional educational practices and pedagogies that strongly rely on teacher instruction as the primary form of knowledge acquisition are more than ever the subject of criticism (Adams & Bell, 2016; Hodgkinson-Williams, Sieborger, & Terzoli, 2007; Sharples et al., 2016). Instead, alternative schools of thought regarding educational practices such as constructivist pedagogy, the critical cultural perspective, and collaborative learning are challenging traditional models by acknowledging and utilising the social and emotional influences on learning (Duffy, Lowyck, & Jonassen,

2012). In the context of this study, this notion is best illustrated by collaborative learning strategies that include "social and affective dynamics between students and between students and faculty" (Love & Love, 1995, p. 7; cf. Adams & Bell, 2016). Here, learning opportunities are regarded as a product of active social practices rather than a process in which students are spectators sitting passively in their classrooms.

Whichever pedagogy a school chooses to subscribe to, it finds itself with the consequent task of providing the opportunities in which knowledge can be acquired. I suggest that the opportunities by which an educational institute imparts knowledge is ultimately a reflection of its values and objectives in an educational sense. The following subsections endeavour to outline literature that addresses the need to redefine educational objectives, the need for civic education, and what lies beyond the formal curriculum from the perspective of the educators.

2.5.1 Going beyond the curriculum

Schools will invariably differ regarding the educational competencies and skills that they prioritise. It appears that, rather than approach education from a holistic perspective, great emphasis and financial resources are put toward increasing the quantitative markers that suggest success, for example the national matric pass rate (Biesta, 2009; Johnson, Johnson & Johnson 2014).

While I do not suggest that quantitative markers are void of any worth, I argue that the concept of educational excellence is more complex than a concept that is informed merely by statistics and numbers. Education itself can be described as the process of shaping the behaviours, thoughts, and feelings of people. In this way, one could regard educational objectives as the kinds of behavioural changes that an institute wishes to promote in its learner body (Tyler, 2013). There has been a recent paradigm shift in certain educational discourse away from the tendency to favour cognitive skills at the expense of social and emotional skills (SES). Increasingly, the latter is regarded as part of a balanced set of educational skills needed to succeed in the 21st century, and countries around the world are embracing multiple approaches in an effort to integrate SES into their curricula (Barry, Clarke, & Dowling, 2017; OECD, 2015).

While cognitive skills such as those we traditionally associate with being measurable are indicative of an individual's likelihood of success in the labour market, they do little in the way of promoting the type of influence that SES has on individuals, such as "better health, improved

subjective well-being and reduced odds of engaging in conduct problems" (OECD, 2015, p. 3). However, what constitutes social and emotional competence?

> Social and emotional competence is the ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one's life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development. (Elias et al., 1997, p. 2)

This illustrates the complexity of educational objectives and offers a persuasive argument that education that incorporates a multi-faceted approach creates the building blocks of a successful individual beyond their economic potential to society. This is reiterated further by a meta-analysis of school-based universal inventions addressing social and emotional learning, which found that social and emotional programmes resulted in "significantly positive effects on targeted social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others, and school" (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011, p. 417). Furthermore, it was found that interventions targeting social and emotional learning also enhanced prosocial behaviours, reduced internalising problems, and improved academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2011).

Goleman (1995) asserts that emotional intelligence is predetermined partially by genetics but can be shaped largely by learning through one's life experiences. This is in line with Darling-Hammond et al. (2019), who outlines various ways in which emotions affect learning, such as peer or educator negativity that may hinder the initialisation of further learning. This prompts us to consider two points. Firstly, are current efforts to address the need for social and emotional development succeeding? Secondly, if not, what can be done to address this shortfall?

In addressing the first question we are faced with the acknowledgment that the overwhelming majority of schools in our country are without adequate resources to offer extramural programmes such as culture and sport where traditionally social and emotional skills are taught inadvertently (Spaull, 2013). Instead, the curriculum as outlined by the Department of Education often stands as the only content imparted to the learners. Curriculum transformation in the decade succeeding democracy in South Africa led to the development of a new learning area referred to as Life Orientation. This learning area was aimed at guiding and preparing learners for life and its potential challenges while equipping learners for meaningful and productive living in a transforming society (Department of Education, 2002). The challenges of the Life Orientation programme are well recorded, with most critics acknowledging the merits of such a programme but identifying major flaws in its implementation at national and

local levels (Chisholm, 2004; Prinsloo, 2007; Rooth, 2005). I suggest that currently, Life Orientation falls short in accomplishing the educational objectives of imparting knowledge to our learners that prepares them better for the social complexities of life after school. Therefore, at the very least, large questions are raised over the adequacy of our current efforts to address the need for social and emotional learning in South Africa. The role of educators further highlights the complexities of the issue. Many schools do not fully take the educational value of Life Orientation seriously, and many educators who are ill equipped or unenthused are thrust into teaching positions. This only serves to hinder the ideals outlined by the Department of Basic Education and implores the need for the educator voice to be listened to (Christiaans, 2006; Opio-Ikuya, 2013).

2.5.2 The argument for civic discourse

Linked to social and emotional skills is the concept of civic education. Civic education refers to knowledge that equips individuals with an understanding of how government works, as well as the acquisition of behaviours required to participate in governance functions such as meetings, collaborating, and discussing within a democratic framework (Goldberg & Mills, 2015; Youniss et al., 2002). However, these principles go beyond a political ideology to inherently include within them principles that promote community through a shared goal of respectfully solving differences and working together for a common interest (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006).

Proponents of the developmental perspective regard civic education as a means to involve students in a way that contributes meaningfully to their communities. This increases the likelihood of future involvement in community organisations and furthermore is believed to develop a greater sense of "agency and social relatedness", which leads to the belief that they are capable role players for social justice (Reichert & Print, 2018, p. 322; Saha & Print, 2010).

In a local context, the #Feesmustfall and #Rhodesmustfall movements mentioned previously set the context for an important component of the argument for civic education, namely that of providing spaces for anti-oppressive possibilities. Vinson (2014, p. 63) describes anti-oppressive possibilities as a "state of affairs in which the respective programs hint at or imply at least some counternarrative; that is, an orientation toward a citizenship education that seeks to challenge, disrupt, and/or counteract the multiple conditions and realities of oppression". This is of particular interest against the backdrop of former 'Model C schools that are often criticised for the slow rate of transformation and reluctance to move toward forms of

governance that are more equitable (Radebe, 2015). Therefore, I argue it is important to encourage and promote spaces in which the dominant narratives experienced in schools can be challenged to create a school in which all participants feel an equal sense of belonging.

The push for a greater willingness to engage in civil discourse is also endorsed by the well-established Facing History and Ourselves organisation. In their classroom guide for educators entitled *Fostering Civil Discourse* (Facing History and Ourselves, n.d.), the organisation argues that the classroom should be a place where learners learn to exchange thoughts, listen attentively, try out ideas and positions, as well as provide and receive constructive feedback without fear or intimidation. They believe that through engaging in often difficult and complex conversations, learners equip themselves with the critical thinking skills, empathy, and tolerance needed to fulfil a sense of civic responsibility.

As mentioned previously, these conversations are seldom integrated effectively with the formalised curriculum (Smith & Arendse, 2016). Rather these conversations spring from the realities of the learners and those around them. In this sense, we can say that civic discourse forms part of what we call the hidden or covert curriculum. Neve and Collett (2018) describe the hidden curriculum as the unplanned, ad hoc learning that occurs outside of the formal, taught curriculum and that can have a powerful influence on students' growth. Jackson (1968), who first coined the term "hidden curriculum", argues that school is a socialisation process where students gain knowledge from simply being in school rather than only through direct instruction.

Through the hidden curriculum, the messages that students receive help form the values, beliefs, and ideologies of broader society. These messages are emphasised through daily routines and curricular content (Kentili, 2009). Furthermore, a study by Rahman (2013) explored the implications of the hidden curriculum on indigenous and minority students across various Australian schools. This provides a valuable window in which to view minority students in former 'Model C schools who, like the aboriginal learners in Australia, find themselves in schools dominated by 'white' cultural values and practices. Rahman (2013, p. 1) argues that it is the learners who do not have the "cultural match-up that schooling requires for success, such as indigenous and minority students, who face the most educational disadvantage". Howard and Perry (2007) argue that minority learners need to feel a sense of belonging as much as any child, and for this to occur, aspects such as culture and language must be embraced in the classroom. This appears to reinforce the importance of effective civic education in our schooling system.

To achieve these means, we must now shift our view to the role of educators. As educators form the focus of this study, it is necessary to explore the ways in which the hidden curriculum is negotiated in the classroom. Furthermore, the informal nature of the hidden curriculum tends to result in widely varied interpretations of what this curriculum should constitute. For this reason, the need to understand the position of educators and provide a platform in which their voices are heard is all the more important.

2.6 Positioning the Educator

Any shifts in educational approaches will affect the roles and identity of educators. As this study focused on how a group of educators had perceived and experienced learner-led policy changes, one wonders how this these experiences may influence teaching and learning. In addition, a further area of inquiry is how teachers may have navigated their and their students' engagement with the various curricula mentioned previously.

Wray et al. (2018) suggest that democracy is an acknowledgement that everyone has a contribution that should be allowed, valued, and respected. Furthermore, they add that teachers have a responsibility beyond standing in front of the class and lecturing; instead, teachers should encourage learners to engage in the process of learning by being able to voice their ideas in order to grapple, debate, and discuss them with their peers and the teacher. Describing his own philosophy as an educator, Hellenberg (in Wray et al., 2018) encourages teachers to guide and challenge their learners to engage in civil discourse in a way that prepares them to become active citizens. This approach is supported by Wentzel (1998), who suggests that the role played by teachers and reflected by broader society is the desire for children to develop a level of competency in social and moral domains *as well as* intellectual skills. Furthermore, the UNESCO report titled *International Conference on Education* states, "Promoting quality education and training for all young people between the ages of 12 and 18/20 is essential to securing a better future and constitute an essential mechanism for combating social exclusion at the local, national and global levels" (UNESCO, 2009, p. 6).

Teachers are central to education, but engaging with civic education requires them to develop skills that go beyond the everyday pedagogies. It requires them to expose their learners and themselves to sometimes uncomfortable learning experiences that embrace challenging and sometimes controversial topics that go beyond their areas of expertise (Goldberg & Mills, 2015). In contemporary educational contexts, various social issues may surface beyond the formal curriculum and need to be engaged.

In the South African context, ongoing challenges related to inequality, social exclusion, intolerance, xenophobia, inadequate engagement in political life, and racism require consistent and sensitive negotiation in the classroom (Nogueira & Moreira, 2010). Whilst educators and educational authorities are cognisant of these challenges, research has found that very little specific training is done in these areas, leaving educators feeling ill equipped to address these issues as they emerge in the school context (Nogueira & Moreira, 2010; Levin, 1998). I concur with Schoeman's (2006) view that the success of citizenship education ultimately rests with teachers at the classroom level. However, a review of the literature suggests that for this to happen effectively, educators need to be active participants in developing policy and practices for implementing this effectively.

2.7 The Importance of Educators' Experiences

Educators are central to curriculum delivery and they also carry with them a wealth of knowledge and experience about the informal school curriculum and learners (and their families) experiences with school culture. Cavieres-Fernandez (2014, p. 1) emphasises the importance of creating a space for teachers voices to be heard as their "experiences constitute a resource of the utmost importance". Quaglia and Lande (2016, p. 8) support this view and argue that educators are able to make a valuable contribution to change at schools because they offer an "insider's perspective of what is working and, just as valuable, what is not working". In addition, the authors draw our attention to the insight that educators provide particularly in working with learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. They suggest that teachers' experiences are closely aligned with their professional knowledge, which in turn formulates the practical knowledge needed to teach and accommodate learners' cultural differences efficiently (Cavieres-Fernandez, 2014; Quaglia & Lande, 2016; Rahman, 2013).

Drawing on my own experience as an educator in the South African context, I am of the view that reflecting with teachers about their experiences of navigating cultural and socio-economic diversity in an ever-changing school context can contribute to the growing body of knowledge about refining and improving the ways in which educators engage with and deliver formalized school curriculum. As South Africa continues to work towards creating schools as more inclusive spaces, it becomes increasingly important to acknowledge teachers as significant role players in transforming school culture. While educators are active participants in the organisational transformation of schools, they often find themselves in the challenging position of being "caught between the contradictory demands and needs of their super-ordinates –

principals – and their subordinates – students" (Ingersoll, 2009, p. 211). Creating spaces for teacher experiences to be acknowledged and for them to become active participants in transforming school culture equips them with the capacity and inclination to seek to become better equipped to fulfil their jobs and gain the respect of those around them (Ingersoll, 2009).

Creating these spaces for the teacher voice to emerge has been the focus of significant research. Next, I reflect on some of the literature that relates to this study. A common theme in the literature relates to the complexity of creating theses spaces and how the educator voice can be utilised effectively. A point of view proposed by Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) relates to the provision of ongoing opportunities to develop teachers professionally, and they state the following in this regard:

> High-quality professional learning frequently provides built-in time for teachers to think about, receive input on, and make changes to their practice by facilitating refection and soliciting feedback. Feedback and reflection both help teachers to thoughtfully move toward the expert visions of practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. vi).

This point of view is supported by researchers who suggest that the value of opportunities for professional development of teachers lies not only in their own personal and professional development but also has a positive bearing on students' performance and learning (Ball, 2016; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). However, some authors caution that this development should entail exposure to and exploration of both the formal and hidden curricula as well as how different stakeholders in the school context experience these (Alsubaie, 2015). I concur with Alsubaie and suggest that failure to acknowledge multiple experiences and voices in the current educational climate has the potential to undermine the transformation agenda of education in post-Apartheid South Africa.

The importance of providing spaces for teacher experiences to be shared has also been linked with lower teacher turnover, greater levels of career satisfaction and better outcomes in the classroom. Research linking the effects of teacher enjoyment with learner enjoyment and consequently learning outcomes is also well documented (Ingersoll, 2009; Keller, Hoy, Goetz, & Frenzel, 2016).

In sum, the literature suggests that it is in the best interest of school management to ensure that educators' voices are not stifled. In turn, this helps create classrooms that are characterised by enjoyment of teaching and learning, whether via the formal or hidden curricula and are likely

to create an optimal environment for promoting positive development of and achievement by learners. Therefore, teachers' reflections give us the richest source of insight into their perceptions of healthy school climates and what constitutes effective teaching and learning in the classroom (Frenzel, Goetz, Lüdtke, Pekrun, & Sutton, 2009; Urbanski, Alves, & Bernstein, 2017).

2.8 Exploring the Forming of Adolescent Identity

Teaching in a high school brings specific challenges with it. Prominent among these is working with young people who are in a developmental phase that focuses primarily on finding their identities separate from those of authority figures. As the study explored reflections of teachers at a high school, on their experience of learner-led policy change, it is important that we seek to understand adolescence. Understanding the stage of life that adolescents occupy and the process of identity formation is pivotal to any considerate effort to recognise the motivational factors contributing to the student voice. While many theoretical frameworks exist from which to view identity formation (Markovitch, Luyckx, Klimstra, Abramson & Knafo-Noam, 2017), the following section endeavours to explore three prominent theories in relation to development and growth in the adolescent years.

2.8.1 Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development

One of the leading theories of the 20th century and still influential today is Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Cherry, 2018; Donald, Lazarus, & Moolla, 2014: Sokol, 2009). Erikson hypothesised that human beings develop through eight successive but interrelated stages that occur throughout one's life (McLeod, 2013). His interest in identity formation during adolescence makes his theory particularly valuable for this study.

According to Erikson, each stage is associated with a conflict or crisis that the individual must encounter and resolve successfully to proceed (Sokol, 2009). Upon successful completion of each stage, the individual will have gained a virtue in relation to that conflict.

Furthermore, these stages occur as part of one's social context, a key concept that Erikson (1959) explained as an acknowledgment that the "individual and society are intricately woven, dynamically related and in continual change" (as cited in Sokol, 2009, p. 140).

Table 1 on the next page, based on McLeod (2013), represents a brief description of each of Erikson's eight stages:

Table 1

Synthesis of Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development

Life Stage	Life Crisis to be Resolved
Birth to 1 year	**Trust versus Mistrust:** Here the infant must learn to trust his/her primary caregiver to meet his/her needs. Stability and consistency on the part of the caregiver is key for the infant to overcome this crisis successfully and move on to the next stage with a sense of hope.
18 months to 3 years	**Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt:** In this stage, the infant must learn to regulate his/her own behaviour and gain a sense of independence. If the crisis is not overcome at this stage, the infant will experience shame and doubt about him- or herself. If the crisis is negotiated successfully, the individual will gain the virtue of will.
3 to 5 years (early childhood)	**Initiative versus Guilt:** In this stage, the child explores his/her world and begins to learn social lessons through play. This is important, as it provides opportunities for the child to initiate activities and exercise interpersonal skills. If this crisis is met successfully, it will create a sense of purpose for the child.
6 to 12 years (school Age)	**Industry versus Inferiority:** In this stage, a child begins to learn new skills, such as reading and writing. Thus, educators begin to take on and have a significant influence on the child's self-esteem. As a result, children will desire the approval of their peers by demonstrating competency in tasks that are valued by those around them. Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of competence.
12 to 18 years (adolescence)	**Identity versus Role Confusion:** In this stage, children begin to explore their sense of self and their independence. Adolescents that are encouraged and reinforced through personal examination will begin to develop a strong sense of self as well as a greater sense of autonomy through independence.
18 to 40 years	**Intimacy versus Isolation:** This stage takes place during young adulthood and is characterised by a need for intimate, loving relationships. Individuals begin to share themselves more intimately with a view to longer-term committed relationships. Success in this stage leads to the virtue of love.
40 to 65 years	**Generativity versus Stagnation:** At this stage of development, the adult experiences a need to create or nurture things that will leave a legacy or benefit others. Raising children, being productive at work or becoming more involved in community work are examples of the fulfilment of generativity, which brings about feelings of accomplishment and usefulness. Success in this stage leads to the virtue of care.
65 and older	**Integrity versus Despair:** This is the final stage of life where adults reflect on then their lives. Erikson believed that feelings of guilt about goals unmet or a life lacking productivity and purpose would lead to feelings of despair, whereas those who have developed the virtue of wisdom could reflect with a sense of closure and completeness.

Note: Adapted from *Erik Erikson* by S. McLeod, 2013.

2.8.1.1 Adolescence

As this study ought to explore the experiences of educators in a high school context, it was important to examine the developmental phase inhabited by the learners with whom educators interact most. Therefore, in relation to Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, greater emphasis was placed on the period of adolescence marked by the fifth stage of development.

Erikson (1965, p. 254) describes the adolescent brain as "essentially a mind or moratorium, a psychosocial stage between childhood and adulthood, and between the morality learned by the child, and the ethics to be developed by the adult". Furthermore, Erikson (1965) believes that the primary task for adolescents is to solve the crisis of identity vs role confusion. By doing so, adolescents are better poised to develop a stable and strong sense of identity.

However, the very notion of identity is a complex one. Erikson (1971) suggests that identity is shaped by three interrelated aspects. The first concerns itself with an individual's own cognitive processes, the second with the context in which one finds oneself, and thirdly, one's physical characteristics that can either encourage or hinder development (Arnold, 2017; Erikson, 1971). The period of adolescence marks the origins in which these three areas become prominent.

Erikson (1965, p. 87) outlines the importance of this life stage further by stating that adolescents must "feel a progressive continuity between that which he has come to be during the long years of childhood and that which he promises to become in the anticipated future; between that which he conceives himself to be and that which he perceives others to see him and expect of him". Again, this speaks to the transitional nature of adolescence and the importance of negotiating this space effectively. I agree with this and suggest that this seemingly inherent drive to find congruency between intrinsic and extrinsic perceptions of one's identity is the fuel by which the student voice is driven.

In addition to Erikson's theory, I have also considered the theories of identity formation proposed by Waterman (1984) and Marcia (1980) which are discussed in the next section.

2.8.2 The development of an integrated sense of self

The development of an integrated sense of self has been linked closely to finding one's place in society and acquiring a sense of self that exists through one's life span (Waterman, 1984; Marcia, 1980). This is important as, like Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial development, it suggests a source of motivation for learner-led policy change. In effect, learners try and

negotiate gaps they identify between their own sense of self and the values, beliefs, and traditions adopted by the institutions around them (Waterman, 1984) to attain an integrated sense of self. This is a key observation and, given the context of South Africa and the slow pace of transformation, it is perhaps fair to state that in many former Model C schools, the aforementioned gap is large.

More recent contributions by Waterman (2015) add to the identity discourse by attempting to break down the various contributing elements that have a bearing on identity formation. These references to identity can be viewed as being "internal, external or interactional" (Waterman, 2015, p. 196). This lends credence to Waterman's work in the context of this study, as it speaks largely to the dynamic and social aspects pertaining to identify formation such as those readily experienced in educational institutions. Of particular relevance to this study are 'external references', which Waterman (2015) describes as pertaining to the ways in which identity is shaped in social and cultural contexts, a concept I argue echoes the importance of addressing the challenges faced in culturally diverse former Model C schools. Furthermore, external references provide a workable term to describe the dominant social and cultural narratives that influence the status quo of a school and by doing so position learners in ways that have a direct bearing on their identity development.

In addition, Waterman (2015, p. 196) speaks of identity that emerges from "discursive and interactional contexts". Here, emphasis is placed on the interactions that occur between individuals because these interactions have a direct and immediate influence on the development of identity (Waterman, 2015). I concur with Waterman and suggest that this provides a strong argument for the inclusion of SVOs and other means by which social and emotional learning can be attained.

The search to integrate values for the purposes of identity formation also appears to bring to the forefront several potential issues that adolescents face. I argue that it is important to acknowledge these issues, as they inform relevant stakeholders where there is a potential need to address.

The first issue Erikson (1963) outlines is the need to consider a choice of occupation that is socially accepted and provides an opportunity for self-expression. While this is generally a concern for older adolescents in preparation for post-school activity, I suggest that this search for opportunities of self-expression also speaks to the desire of adolescents to fill their time with activities that attempt to reflect their ideals as they see them at any given time. This is

evident in the various extramural avenues of schooling (when available) toward which adolescents orientate themselves to express themselves. Furthermore, I believe this appears to reflect the influence of "external references" and "discursive and interactional contexts" outlined by Waterman (2015, p. 196).

Waterman (1984, p. 341) outlines a further potential developmental challenge, which occurs when adolescents attempt to form an "ideological worldview that is worthy of personal commitment". According to Heywood (2017, p. 2), ideologies provide a "perspective, or 'lens' through which the world is understood and explained". Naturally, the search for an ideology that integrates one's sense of self will be influenced by multiple sources such as one's family, community, religious affiliation, and the media, but again I suggest that Waterman's description of "external references and "discursive and interactional context" point with vigour toward the formalised structure of schooling as pivotal means in this search.

Waterman (1984, p. 341) states that "the task is to find modes of expression that reflect intrinsic inclinations and for which sufficient sources of social support exist within the individual's cultural milieu". While Waterman's opinions date back nearly four decades, they are still highly valued, and I argue that little has changed in adolescents' desire to find their voice and strengthen it through social affirmation and peer support. Furthermore, I believe this line of thinking suggests a possible reason for the escalation of learner unrest in 2016 in that learners at the time apparently wanted to satisfy a deeper intrinsic motivation to align society with the ideology with which they had aligned themselves.

2.8.3 Exploration and commitment: Examining identity status

Any review of literature regarding identity formation requires an exploration of the work attributed to Marcia (1980), who expanded Erikson's ideas on identity formation. According to Marcia (1980), two behavioural indicators, namely that of exploration and commitment, underpin an individual's identity status. He describes exploration as referring to the active engagement, questioning and grappling of various identity 'alternatives' before making a decision about the values, beliefs, and goals that one will pursue (Mancini, Caricati, Panari, & Tonarelli, 2015). In turn, commitment consists of making choices in an identity domain considered important and engaging in significant activities that reflect the implementation of that choice (Mancini et al., 2015).

It is widely accepted that learners today are more engaged and aware of the world in which they live (Marino et al., 2016). Technology has created an environment where views, beliefs, and opinions are transferred readily at the click of a button, a concept encapsulated by the modern movement known as connectivism (Sjøberg, 2007). It follows that this ease of communication allows learners to explore ideas traditionally associated with identity formation in a larger context and with a wider range of ideologies from which to explore. In the light of this, it is my view that when young learners in the midst of identity exploration witness the evolutionally nature of activism as portrayed by their tertiary student counterparts through platforms such as social media, it is not difficult to comprehend their desire to mobilise in an effort to replicate the strength of that voice.

The mobilisation and subsequent activism can be regarded as an attempt on the part of learners to commit to what they perceive as being desirable or necessary values, beliefs, or goals.

This aligns with Marcia, who attempts to classify individuals into four statuses dependent on the extent of their exploration of identity alternatives and subsequently their commitment to values, beliefs, and goals (Mancini et al., 2015).

Table 2

Four Stages of Identity Status

Stage	Identity Status
Achievement	Have made a commitment after a period of exploration.
Foreclosure	Have made a strong commitment without having explored alternatives.
Moratorium	Have not made a commitment but still actively exploring possible alternatives.
Diffusion	Have not made a commitment and lack of exploration.

Note. Adapted from "Personal and Social Aspects of Professional Identity" by Mancini et al., 2015, *Journal of Vocational Behaviour, 89*, pp. 140-150. Copyright 2016 by PsycINFO Database Record.

During adolescence, learners generally find themselves in one of these four statuses. Invariably, their progression depends on a multitude of factors including peer groups, community setting, socio-economic status, and schooling (Crocetti, 2017). The latter of these is best positioned to provide learners with opportunities of exploration such as student voice opportunities (SVOs). I believe these serve as a means through which adolescents may present themselves and their ideas or seek validation from others. Holland and Skinner (2008) reiterate this point, extending

it to the use of literacy and arguing that the way in which people use literacy as part of wider social movements to effect change (be it through social, cultural, and political means) has actually received little attention. They suggest further that these literacy activities (e.g., writing letters to mobilise community members, twitter feeds, and artistic murals) can be viewed as artefacts of identity formation that too have the power to transform. In view of this, one begins to understand the immense influence that every facet of schooling exerts in the development of identity.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to provide a comprehensive review of the literature pertaining to the research question. In doing so, several areas of interest were explored, beginning with an attempt to outline the historical context and challenges associated with the student voice. This was necessary, given its importance in framing the contextual position of educators, who were the primary focus of this study. The chapter also provided a comprehensive exploration of social constructivism as the theoretical framework from which the literature was viewed. This framework provided the means to examine the various contextual factors that influence learners' and educators' experiences.

My exploration of the literature revealed that several local studies mention the democratisation and transformation of education in South African schools. As this theme was discussed broadly by the participants of this study, I decided to include a review of the literature relevant to this area. This was followed by an overview of various learning theories to understand how knowledge is acquired and an examination of the case made for the inclusion of civic education. The chapter then shifted focus toward the value of educator experience with the premise that it offers us an insider's perspective into the efficiency and functionality of informal and formalised curriculum delivery.

Finally, various theories pertaining to adolescent identity formation were reviewed, with focus on Erikson's psychosocial theory of development. In the next chapter, the methods and approach that informed this study will be explained.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Research is aimed at obtaining data to formulate ideas and add to the body of knowledge in a given field. In the context of this study, the research did not attempt to find a practical solution to the issues raised, but rather to present their findings as a contribution to existing knowledge in a way that may have practical applications (Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, & Walker, 2018). In this study, methodology refers to the collection of methods and practices used in the formulation of a particular piece of research as well as the paradigms, theories, and values that form the basis on which a particular approach to research has been employed (Silverman, 2016; Somekh & Lewin, 2012). For this reason, the purpose of this chapter is to provide deeper insight into the methodological aspects of this study than those outlined in Chapter 1. Furthermore, it will provide insight into the research paradigm, design, and methodology that informed the frame of reference I adopted for the purposes of this study.

Lastly, it was also important to state the ethical guidelines and considerations to ensure the study adheres to sound ethical practices that acknowledge and respect the rights and contributions of participants (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

3.2 Research Paradigm

As the study is based on the experiences and voices of educators, the social constructivist paradigm was deemed appropriate. This paradigm was selected for the study because it lent prominence to the lived realities of the individual participants and provided the researcher the space within which to interact with the participants (Babbie, 2015; Bryman, 2016). In addition, Creswell (2014) says that social constructivists are of the view that individuals actively strive to understand their world and, in the process, may develop subjective meanings and construct their own interpretation of what they experience.

The adoption of a social constructivist paradigm requires the acknowledgment of certain assumptions regarding knowledge. According to Kiraly (2013), many different perspectives exist when analysing the process of knowledge construction. Socially centred perspectives tend to see knowledge as a construction and product of interpersonal collaboration. Making an epistemological assumption about the nature of truth and reality being fluid and subject to the experiences of individuals, Jovchelovitch (2019) argues that at the base of all knowledge is a

link to the dynamic interrelations between the individual, others, and the object world. Jovchelovitch (2019) states further that understanding the formation, development, and realisation of these interrelations in society provides the key to explaining what connects knowledge to personal, interpersonal, and sociocultural contexts. This aligns with Merriam's (1998, p. 22) view that the epistemological paradigm that best informs qualitative study is constructivism, which best echoes the "key philosophical assumptions upon which all types of qualitative research are based", namely that "reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds". As this study sought to reflect on teachers' experiences of change in their school context, this dynamic interaction was of particular interest. The aforementioned, as well as Merriam's assertion about research in the educational context, seeks to "produce knowledge about the world – in our case, the world of educational practice" (Merriam, 1998, p. 3).

In addition to the epistemological paradigm, one must consider the ontological and methodological beliefs and choices that drive the qualitative research process. In research, ontology provides the framework within which a researcher views the nature of reality (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As such, ontology has roots in philosophy, seeking to understand existence and the nature of being. My ontological stance is that the nature of reality is subjective and constructed; therefore, there are no objective truths in people's experiences (Creswell, 2014; Keaton & Bodie, 2011). I believe this stance afforded me the opportunity to experience each participant's views and perceptions as being valuable sources of subjective truths and knowledge. This study purposely sought the educators' subjective experiences of their relations with learners and colleagues in the context of the school environment at the time of learner-led policy change.

Linked closely with ontology is epistemology, which examines the relationship between the researcher and what is being researched and asks the question of how knowledge can be acquired. Or how can we know what we know? In answering this question, I concur with Creswell and Poth (2016) and Silverman (2016), who are of the view that when doing a qualitative study, knowledge is acquired more readily when researchers try to shorten the distance between themselves and the participants. In this study it meant that the research was to be conducted at the school, a social and cultural context occupied by the participants. This allowed me to gain greater insight into the contextual factors that may have contributed or that continued to contribute to the participants' views and beliefs about the phenomena under study. Furthermore, researchers suggest that conducting research in an environment familiar to the

participant could create a greater sense of ease for the individual, thus increasing the likelihood of richness in the data (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Silverman, 2016).

By establishing these stances, as they pertain to my ontological and epistemological beliefs, I established the framework from which I shaped my world view and guided my engagement in the research process. Aware of this and the fact that I had been an educator at the school, I was very conscious of the need for regular reflection to assess the extent to which it might be influencing my position in the research process. The literature refers to this as reflexivity. According to Day (2012), reflexivity allows us to consider three fundamental variables at the centre of qualitative inquiry. These include the ontological and epistemological assumptions as previously outlined, the consideration of the role "power, identity and positionality" play in the process and how methodological issues are addressed in order to produce valid and reliable research (Day, 2012, p. 61). In addition I remained mindful of Palaganas (2017) view that reflexivity should be used as a tool that enables researchers to examine their interpretations and to have a clear understanding of the means by which they have made certain deductions about the data. According to Palaganas (2017), the process requires a researcher to be vigilant and mindful of what underpins one's assumptions in data analysis. I shall discuss exploration of reflexivity in greater depth in 3.8.2.3.

3.3 Research Methodology

The methodological approach selected for this research study was informed by a social constructivist paradigm. This paradigm, as previously stated, illustrates a world view in which individuals co-create subjective meaning from their experiences with others. Therefore, acquisition of knowledge by the researcher needed to occur alongside the participants to portray an accurate understanding of their experiences. For this reason, I considered a qualitative case study as most appropriate.

3.3.1 Qualitative research

The qualitative method should be understood as a means of doing comprehensive, systematic, and authentic research that is aligned closely with the human experience. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 3) this means that qualitative researchers "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them". Furthermore, the nature of some research projects may benefit more significantly from a qualitative approach. For example, qualitative research is often considered

the best fit for research that seeks to explore sensitive phenomena with a particular group, population, or where one wishes to access silenced voices or when a complex, detailed understanding is required in order to understand a specific issue better (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). While I readily acknowledge that the educators in this research study are not silenced, it is worth noting that they had not had been afforded the opportunity previously to share their experiences of learner-led policy change with a wider audience. In the course of the study, I remained mindful of the ways in which the political complexities of the type of educational institution that was the focus of this study could influence participants' sense of vulnerability in sharing their experiences authentically. For this study to make a contribution to the ongoing challenges of schools in the South African context, I believed a qualitative research approach would be most appropriate for the aim of this study, as it would ensure that the views and contributions of individuals were understood and add value.

To ensure that a complex picture and understanding of the problem or issue developed, it was important for me to work closely alongside the participants of this study. By using a qualitative approach, I was able to gain multiple perspectives from those who were most closely aligned with the ethos of the school and thus had an insider's knowledge. The literature suggests that this can be considered a more holistic approach in that it attempts to understand a phenomenon as a whole, while not ignoring the social environment in which the experiences are located (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, being able to conduct the research in the school and with a small sample group helped to create a sense of environmental and interpersonal familiarity among the participants, which afforded an opportunity to generate rich, nuanced data (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002; Gill & Baillie, 2018).

Another reason for opting for a qualitative approach was the limited research base of the research topic. Leedy and Ormrod (2015) suggest that when research on a given topic is limited and the variables are largely unknown, a qualitative approach is more appropriate as it can assist the researcher identify variables more readily. In this study, apparent limitations in the literature exist in that the expression of activism and civic education is generally confined to the classroom as opposed to extracurricular activities. In addition, where it does exist, research appears to gravitate toward the student voice rather than an exploration of educators' experiences.

While qualitative research was deemed the best fit for this study, acknowledgment of the potential challenges was necessary to ensure thorough understanding. Rosetto (2014) identifies

one such challenge and suggests that while qualitative research can be therapeutic for participants and offer rich data, it can equally pose a challenge for the researcher because the interviewees can mistake the interview as therapy and view the interviewer as a therapist. With this in mind, Rossetto (2014, p. 486) suggests that researchers carefully "maintain boundaries to protect the researcher-participant relationship and ethical obligations to do no harm". Furthermore, he reminds us that a researcher's role is primarily that of a listener, learner, and observer and therefore should not be confused with that of a therapist.

To address this potential for blurred boundaries, I made provision for the participants to have access to a trained clinical psychologist and informed them that they could arrange to speak to this person, should they experience any personal discomfort because of participation in this study. I informed the participants that the provision of this service was a prerequisite for ethical clearance and that they could contact the psychologist without informing me. They were provided with the contact information during the initial individual interview.

3.3.2 Research design

Through the framework of a social constructivist paradigm, this research adopted a case study design. According to Cresswell and Poth (2017), case study research involves the exploration of an issue by means of one or more case studies in a specific context. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), this make case studies *'particularistic'*, as there is a focus on a particular phenomenon, event, or situation. Additionally, researchers adopting a qualitative design seek to explore a case through comprehensive, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of data such as interviews, focus groups, and observations, thus contributing to the second characteristic highlighting the *'descriptive'* nature of case studies. A third characteristic describes case studies as being *'heuristic'* in that they seek to bring the reader as close as possible to the phenomenon to bring about deeper understanding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 43).

In terms of case study variation, Cresswell and Poth (2017) outline three types of case studies, as summarised in Table 3 below, which are selected according to the intent of the researcher.

Table 3

Case Study Variation

Type of Case Study	Explanation
Instrumental case study	A particular case is used to gain a general understanding of a phenomenon.
Collective or multiple-case study	Multiple-case studies are used to obtain a general understanding of a phenomenon. These can occur from within the same site or across multiple sites.
Intrinsic case study	A case is used to obtain knowledge about a unique phenomenon on which the study is focused.

Note: Adapted from "Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches" by J. W. Cresswell and C. N. Poth, 2017. Copyright 2017 by Sage Publications.

Considering the objectives of this study, a single instrumental case study was deemed most appropriate, as the study deals with a primary concern, namely that of teachers' experiences of learner-led policy change and was located within one bounded case, a former Model C school with a history of learner-driven activism.

In addition, it is important to delineate the boundaries of what a case study entails or does not entail. Researchers identify one of the common associations with this type of research as a tendency by researchers to attempt to answer questions that are too broad or that contain too many objectives (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Cresswell & Poth, 2017; Yin, 2003). Some of the suggestions made by Baxter and Jack (2008) to researchers wanting to avoid the aforementioned issues include binding a case in terms of time, place, activity, definition, and/or context. They add that through meticulous consideration of boundaries, the researcher is not only in a better position to select the sample but also better able to indicate the breadth and depth of the study.

3.4 Participant Recruitment

As data gathering is a crucial step in research that contributes to better understanding of a theoretical framework, it is pivotal that the manner of obtaining data and from whom the data are collected is of great importance (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The need for this consideration is emphasised further when the study is placed within its educational context (Bartlett et al., 2017). The subsections to follow will endeavour to present how decisions were made pertaining to participant recruitment.

3.4.1 Research setting

Understanding the context of the research is important, as it provides information about the unique challenges these educators experience in the complex and often nuanced school, political, and organisational context. As it involves a specific bounded case, I have chosen to provide a brief contextual description of the research site.

Of great importance to this study is the historical context of the school on which this study is based. Known previously as a Model C school, Parkfield High School was reserved exclusively for white students during the Apartheid regime. Currently, it is classified as a Quintile 5 school which relates to the financial contribution of the parent body (see Chapter 1). The school has enjoyed significant academic success over a considerable period and is well resourced in terms of physical infrastructure and access to additional educators due to the financial contributions of fee-paying parents. The demographics of the school have changed considerably since Parkfield's founding in the 1950s. Despite having a still largely white learner body, there has been a distinct increase in the racial and cultural diversity of the learner body, although this increase, as it appears in many former Model C schools, has occurred at painstakingly slow rates (Spaull, 2013). Furthermore, the demographic make-up of the teaching faculty is still predominately white with even slower rates of transformation.

3.4.2 Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was deemed most appropriate, as I had an insider's knowledge of the views held by many of the staff and furthermore was aware of who would be willing or able to provide rich data according to the selection criteria. This is in line with guidelines provided by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011), who state that purposive sampling is a method of sampling aimed at selecting participants based on characteristics and the potential value that they could contribute to the study.

The number of participants presented an additional factor to address. Purposive sampling is a non-random technique that does not require a set number of participants. Instead, choosing the number of participants required me to consider how many interviews would be enough to reach data saturation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). According to Fusch & Ness (2015, p. 1), "data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study, when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible". This can be achieved in as few as six interviews, depending on the size of the sample

(Guest et al., 2006). The point made here is that there is a distinctive difference between quality and quantity of information; therefore, reaching data saturation is not simply about the number of participants at the expense of data richness. It was my view that having a smaller sample size would enable me to extract more depth through an intimate exploration with fewer participants. However, I could not provide a set number, as this was dependent on data saturation. After having interviewed six participants comprising an approximate 20% of the potential sample pool, it was determined that data saturation had been reached, as no new themes were emerging, and sufficient information had been obtained.

3.4.2.1 Considerations pertaining to school and participant selection criteria

Working from a social constructivist perspective, I believed it important to include, where possible, participants that would present multiple and diverse perspectives pertaining to learner-led policy change. To achieve this aim, two primary selection criteria were considered. Firstly, potential participants were required to have had first-hand exposure to learner-led policy change, and secondly, diversity among the participants was pursued.

To achieve these aims, a suitable site was required for the study. Parkfield High School was selected because an abundance of readily available documentation outlining the prominent learner-led policy changes that occurred at the school in 2016 existed. These were a good example of comparable protests at other similar historically classified schools. Secondly, the staff of the school, from which participants would be chosen, contained a moderately diverse population that allowed me to select participants who were diverse with regard to gender and age, had varying degrees of experience, and were possibly racially diverse. It should be noted that while the latter was aimed for, this proved to be a challenge with only one person of colour forming part of the eventual participant list. However, gender diversity was achieved with a 50/50 make-up of males and females. In addition, a third of the participants were members of the senior management team of the school, and the remainder had varying degrees of experience, thus highlighting experiential diversity.

A third consideration was also important, namely that I had been a member of the staff during 2016 and was aware of the diverse views held by several staff members. While this insider's knowledge afforded me ease of access to the staff and their email addresses upon obtaining ethical clearance, I also had to re-assure participants of the anonymity of their participation and maintain clear researcher and participant boundaries. Ultimately, I believed the advantage of my familiarity with the research site would be of great benefit to the study.

3.4.2.2 Biographical information of selected participants

Table 4 shows the biographical information, teaching experience, and qualifications of the participants.

Table 4

Biographical Information of Selected Participants

GENDER	
Male	3
Female	3
AGE	
20 – 29	1
30 – 39	2
40 – 49	3
YEARS TEACHING EXPERIENCE	
0 – 5 years	2
6 – 10 years	1
11 – 15 years	
16 – 20 years	
21 – 25 years	3
HIGHEST QUALIFICATION	
Degree and diploma	3
Honours degree	3
POST LEVEL	
Teacher	3
Head of department	2
Deputy principal	1
PHASES(S) TEACHING	
Intermediate phase	6
Senior phase	6

Source: Compiled by researcher.

3.5 Data Collection

Before the data collection process began, the school was consulted, and permission was gained to interview teachers who had been employed at the school since the 2016 academic year (see

Appendix D). In addition, permission was obtained from the Western Cape Education Department (see Appendix E) and the Research Ethics Committee of Stellenbosch University (see Appendix F) to ensure all ethical requirements were met.

Once permission had been granted, the first phase of the recruitment process commenced. Various potential participants were identified with the aim to obtain a comprehensive array of experiences regarding learner-led policy change. This was achieved by selecting participants with a variety of teaching and managerial experience and who were representative, where possible, of various ethnic groups and genders.

Once a list of potential candidates had been finalised, a comprehensive information brochure (see Appendix G) was sent out via email. This included all aspects including the aims and objectives of the study, the research questions, ethical considerations, confidentiality, and logistical details such as place and time. In addition, a consent declaration was attached for the participants to read. At that stage, potential participants were only required to express their interest in participation.

The second phase commenced after sufficient interest had been raised. Individual meetings were scheduled to explain the study verbally and thus ensure all potential participants understood the research fully and comprehensively. When the participants felt comfortable, consent forms were collected, and arrangements were made to conduct the round of individual interviews. Participants were interviewed on site in their classrooms because it was a private and familiar environment for each participant.

For this study, data were collected using semi-structured, in-depth interviews (see Appendix H) and a focus group session (see Appendix I).

3.5.1 Semi-structured individual interviews

According to King, Horrocks, and Brooks (2019), qualitative interviews emphasise open-ended, non-leading questions, which are designed to place the focus on personal experience while building rapport with the interviewee. Seidman (2019) supports this focus on personal experience and says the following:

> The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions… At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experiences of other people

> and the meaning they make of that experience.… At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth. (Seidman, 2019, p. 9)

I agree with Seidman's (2019) view that interviewing provides us with a window through which to view the world of the participants and gain insight into their beliefs, values, and perceptions. As this study specifically focused on the experiences of educators, I believed that this method of data collection would be best aligned with the aim of the study.

According to Merriam and Grenier (2019), semi-structured interviews utilise open-ended questions that are adaptable and guided by the encounter between the interviewer and participant. An important characteristic of a semi-structured interview (SSI) is the potential for participants to "raise their own topics during the conversation" (Merriam & Grenier, 2019, p. 260). The opportunity to do this encourages the sharing of personal stories, from which meaning is derived. Adams (2015) shares this view, adding that semi-structured interviews are particularly of value when the researcher wants to know the independent thoughts of everyone in a group. As this research sought to explore the varied experiences of several educators, this form of interview was deemed appropriate. Secondly, SSIs allowed me the benefit of a question guideline (see Appendix H) that served to keep the discussions on track while at the same time being open to exploring related but perhaps unconsidered elements of the research question. In effect, this placed me in an advantageous position of being able to adjust the research as it developed over time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2019; Silverman, 2016).

SSIs are not without their challenges, however. According to Adams (2015, p. 493), SSIs are "time-consuming, labour intensive, and require interviewer sophistication". The latter of these points required a considerable exploration of potential challenges unique to this study.

One of the challenges that became apparent was my need to negotiate the potential for informant bias between myself as the interviewer and my previous colleagues as the interviewees. The concern here was that, given my previous employment at the school, I was privy to the learner-led processes that formed the basis of the interviews. In other words, at some stage in the past, I held some form of opinion as to these processes and bore witness to the dominant narrative held by the staff. This was important, as Drever (1995, p. 31) suggests that "people's willingness to talk to you, and what people say to you, is influenced by who they think you are". Therefore, the participants' preconceived ideas as to which side of the 'fence' I positioned myself had the potential to influence the conversation and thus the richness of the data. I attempted to address this by acknowledging my knowledge of the processes with all participants and, perhaps more

importantly, reiterating that my interest lay in hearing their stories objectively and without judgment, regardless of the view they held. Furthermore, all participants were made aware that if they wished to withdraw at any time, they could do so without any consequence.

Another challenge, albeit a logistical one, became apparent when considering the busy schedules of the teaching staff. With various timetables, extramural activities, and occupational fatigue, I decided that conducting the interviews during the school examinations was best because, according to the participants, this period had less extramural and academic commitments. In addition, the interviews were 40-60 minutes in length and conducted in English, as this was the participants' language of preference (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The interviews were audio recorded with permission, and these were then transcribed verbatim to preserve the integrity of the interview. Furthermore, participants were reminded that any identifiers would be coded to ensure anonymity and that they might withdraw from the study at any time, should they wish to. Inductive data analysis after the initial interviews allowed me to identify various patterns and themes, which formed the basis for the focus group session (Cresswell & Poth, 2017; Patton, 2015).

3.5.2 Focus group

Focus groups provide a method to collect qualitative information. This involves moderating a small group of participants in an informal discussion guided by a focus group guide (Krueger, 2014). In the case of this study, all six participants involved in the individual interviews were invited to participate in the focus group to explore the themes that emerged during the individual interviews further.

The literature suggests various advantages of focus groups, one of which is that they are particularly useful in providing safe and familiar contexts in which participants can converse among people they might know (Krueger, 2014; Wilkinson, 2016). A further advantage is that focus groups have the capacity to illuminate group dynamics present in a context, which may not emerge during individual interviews. This data generation tool relates directly to the social constructivist paradigm that guided this study, because in the focus group, meaning was ascribed to the educators' experiences. It was particularly interesting to note how educators experienced the incidents, practices, and process related to the uniform and jewellery policy changes in 2016. Observing the conversation, tone and body language provided rich data and insight into the views and experiences of the participants. I therefore concur with Barbour

(2018) that focus groups have the potential to bring about unexpected insights that are unlikely to arise in the context of individual interviews.

A further advantage of using focus groups is that participants are more likely to "express opinions that they perceive might not fit with the researcher's expectations" (Hatch, 2002, p. 132). This was a particularly important consideration, as I was familiar with the participants and the context. I am of the view that using focus groups in this study created a space in which participants contributed freely and thus afforded me what the literature refers to as unhindered and/or unfiltered data. Furthermore, in the group setting, colleagues were able to "relate each other's comments to incidents in their shared daily lives" (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 300). This created a space to identify the experiences that resonated with theirs and to consider other perspectives of the same experience. As the session progressed, participants appeared to become increasingly comfortable with engaging around complex issues about which they had been reticent in the individual interviews. One such example was observed when discussing the metrics by which a school could consider itself to be progressive. During the focus group, there appeared to be a greater tendency to examine this with a more critical lens.

The literature cautions researchers to remain sensitive to power dynamics or dominance by some participants in focus group discussions. I was particularly conscious of this, as the participants occupied various positions in the school community and had varying degrees of experience. When I became aware that the more assertive voices were dominating the conversational space, I ensured that all the participants were given an opportunity to express their views (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Silverman, 2016).

My role in the focus group was that of moderator. According to Gibbs (2012), the interviewer adopts this role and is responsible for providing clear guidelines about the purpose of the group. In addition, the researcher ensures that the participants feel at ease and facilitates the flow of discussion in the group. In preparation for this process, I reviewed literature related to focus group facilitation and sought to equip myself with the knowledge and skills required to encourage debate and to probe when comments were vague. In addition, there were times when the conversation drifted off course and I had to refocus the discussion. Krueger (2014) cautions moderators not to indicate too much approval for views, as some may view this as favouring the views of certain participants. I also remained mindful of my own views and biases, as I did not want to influence the participants toward a particular stance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Krueger, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis can be described as the process of making sense of the data that have been gathered to answer the research questions. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), qualitative data analysis is a process of organising the mass of data collected in a way that brings about structure and enables the making of meaning. This is usually achieved through a process of identifying categories and themes of data to increase one's understanding of a phenomenon. The nature of qualitative data analysis, with its emphasis on the experience of the participants, means that researchers follow a process in which they remain open, alert and flexible yet structured when engaging with the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Silverman, 2016).

To ensure I was in a position in which this was possible, the data collected during the individual interviews and focus group discussion were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. These transcripts were then coded, using the NVivo 12 software for qualitative research. Qualitative software such as NVivo allow researchers to obtain rigour when working with data (Hilal & Alabri, 2013). The use of a computer aids researchers in working more methodically and attentively. In addition, the software reduces manual tasks, which frees up time to explore patterns, recognise themes and draw conclusions (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Hilal & Alabri, 2013). Once coding had been completed, thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse, and report on the various themes and patterns uncovered in the data.

3.6.1 Thematic analysis

The importance of adopting a method of analysis is multifaceted and includes aspects that not only guide the researcher but also lay the groundwork needed for future researchers to understand how the data were studied and what assumptions informed their analysis. This is important because, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), it provides the means by which studies can be evaluated, compared, and/or synthesised with other studies on that topic. Thematic analysis was selected as the preferred means of data analysis. At its core, this method of analysis "minimally organises and describes your data set in rich detail" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6).

A researcher undergoes multiple phases when adopting a thematic approach to analysis. The phases shown in Table 5, including a summary of each, are based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis and were used as a guide throughout the process.

Table 5

Synthesis of the Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description
Phase 1: *Familiarise yourself with the data*	This requires the researcher to immerse him-/herself in the data to the extent that he or she is familiar with the depth and breadth of the content. This involves repeated readings with an eye for meanings, patterns, and themes.
Phase 2: *Generate initial codes*	This involves the production of codes that help identify a feature of the data that is of interest and refers to basic markers of the information that can be analysed meaningfully.
Phase 3: *Search for themes*	Once coded and collated, this phase involves shifting the analysis from codes to broader themes by sorting the codes into potential themes and collating all the relevant coded data into the identified themes. By doing so, one considers how different codes combine to form an overarching theme.
Phase 4: *Review themes*	This involves the refinement of themes from the list of candidate themes. This helps differentiate between genuine themes and themes with only limited data-drawn support. In addition, two or more themes may be combined into one.
Phase 5: *Define and name themes*	In this phase, the essence of themes is identified, and a detailed analysis is conducted and written for each. It is important to consider how these themes fit into the research question and the broader 'story' told about the data.
Phase 6: *Produce the report*	Once the themes have been worked out fully, the researcher begins to formulate in a way that offers a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the data across all themes.

Note: Adapted from "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology" by V. Braun and V. Clarke, 2006, *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), pp. 16-23. Copyright 2006 by University of the West of England.

The process outlined in Table 5 began upon receipt of the transcribed audio recordings. I began by re-familiarising myself with the data, as several weeks had passed since the conclusion of the interviews and the focus group discussion. During that time, notes were recorded, highlighting a potential list of possible codes. Next, a second and a third reading were done. I then used the NVivo 12 analysis software as a tool that provided the means for rapid analysis, comparison, and synthesis. This was achieved primarily by importing the complete transcripts for both individual and focus discussions. As I had already read the transcripts multiple times and consequently had recorded potential themes, I was then able to create nodes (folders) within

the software that allowed me to drag and drop data that were relevant to those topics. This process was guided strictly by the actual words used by the participants, and only the themes or topics that were expressed across multiple sources were considered for contribution to a node. In this way, potential themes that might have been overlooked or missed were brought to the fore.

However, it is equally important to note that NVivo does not replace the researcher in the tasks of code creation, assigning codes to specific data, and decision making with regard to the grouping of codes into categories (Oliveira, Bitencourt, Teixeira, & Santos, 2013).

Once a thorough list of codes had been established (see Appendix C), I spent time discerning whether these could be broken down into sub nodes. Once I was content with the node classification, the process of review could commence. Codes that appeared infrequently or lacked substantial support were discarded, while those that appeared repeatedly became the overarching themes (see Appendix C) of the study. These were then analysed, synthesised, and defined in preparation for the documentation.

3.7 Ensuring Credibility and Trustworthiness

Ensuring the validity of a study is a field of research that has evolved steadily over the past several decades. Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 239) describe how "prior to 1990 the concepts of objectivity, reliability and internal validity were used to access qualitative research. In the next decade, 1990-2000, the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were thought to be more suitable." More recently, there appears to be an attempt to align the type of qualitative study with criteria for validity and reliability (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Irrespective of the terminology used, it appears that most experts agree that qualitative research requires attention to rigour and close examination of the processes involved in collecting, analysing, and presenting data (Rettke, Pretto, Spichiger, Frei & Spirig, 2018). For the purposes of this study, the terms *trustworthiness* and *credibility* will be used to refer to various considerations of validity. Next, some of the methods used in this study are discussed.

3.7.1 Triangulation

Triangulation strengthens the trustworthiness of a study by combing multiple methods (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Patton, 2015; Silverman, 2016). This study utilised methodical triangulation by corroborating evidence from both the individual interviews, subsequent focus

group discussion, and consultation of electronic field notes (as outlined in 1.6.5) to study a single problem. Patton (2015) suggests that triangulation clarifies aspects of the phenomenon that complement one another while highlighting areas where the data diverge. The latter can form the basis for areas of interest and bring about new insights.

In addition to methodological triangulation, perspective triangulation was utilised by using supervision sessions in which information such as possible codes and themes (as they pertain to various theories) were discussed between the researcher and the supervisor, as well as with an external peer (Patton, 2015). An example of this included discussions pertaining to the 'hidden' or covert curriculum as a lens by which to view extracurricular learning opportunities.

3.7.2 Code-recode strategy

The code-recode strategy was used as an additional method to strengthen trustworthiness. This entails the researcher coding the data twice with a period (two weeks in this case) between readings. The two sets of results are then compared to observe any differences or similarities (Anney 2014; Chilisa & Preece, 2005). If the coding corresponds, the dependability of the research is enhanced. Furthermore, this process helps the researcher "gain a deep understanding of data patterns and improves the presentation of participant's narrations" (Anney, 2014, p. 278).

3.7.3 Reflexivity

According to Patton (2015, p. 64), "reflexivity has entered the qualitative lexicon as a way of emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, political/cultural consciousness, and ownership of one's perspective". In qualitative research, reflexivity forms an integral part of engaging the data and exploring findings. Patton (2015, p. 495) suggest three sets of questions pivotal to triangulated reflexive inquiry, as summarised in Table 6.

Table 6

Considerations Regarding Triangulated Reflexive Inquiry

Type of Reflexivity	Brief Description
Self-reflexivity	The researcher is continually engaged with questions about their epistemology.
Reflexivity about those studied	The researcher considerers the epistemology and world views of participants.
Reflexivity about audience	The researcher considers how the audience makes sense of the information given to them, how both audience and researcher perceive each other and the implications thereof for the process of report writing.

Note: Adapted from Qualitative research and evaluation methods by M. Q. Patton, 2015, p. 72. Copyright 2015 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

These considerations are important, as one's perspectives and world views have the potential to influence not only data collection but also the interpretation thereafter. Reflexivity provides a "framework for sorting through these issues during analysis and report writing and then including in the report how these reflections informed your findings" (Patton, 2015, p. 495). To achieve this level of reflexivity, I kept an electronic research journal. I used a voice recorder to record my thoughts and feelings on various aspects as they occurred throughout the research process. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), this assists the researcher to gain a greater sense of awareness over his or her biases and emotions and thus strengthens the trustworthiness of the research process and consequent findings.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The expectation is that the researcher will behave in a morally and ethically responsible way. The researcher is obliged to conduct research ethically and to behave ethically towards each participant. Therefore, ethical considerations in a qualitative study largely relate to the trustworthiness of the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Merriam & Tisdell (2016, p. 260) suggest that it is the "training, experience, and intellectual rigour of the researcher that determines the credibility of a qualitative research study".

Therefore, to obtain intellectual rigour it is pivotal to review the literature as it pertains to the question of ethics. For this reason, I have drawn on the ethical principles indicated in the literature to uphold the philosophical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence.

3.8.1 Ethical clearance

According to Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole (2013), the responsibility of ensuring that research is conducted ethically rests on the researcher. To this end, I strove to reach the level of ethical standards required by the Research Ethics Committee of Human Research of Stellenbosch University (see Appendix F) and was subsequently granted clearance. This occurred prior to any communication with the research site or potential participants to ensure that potential risks were minimised (Bless et al., 2013). Once ethical clearance had been granted, I obtained permission to conduct the research from the Western Cape Department of Education (see Appendix E) and the governing body of the school at which the research would be conducted (see Appendix D). To do so required transparency as well as the submission of a comprehensive proposal.

3.8.2 Informed consent

Informed consent relates to the right of participants or institutions to know that they are the subject of research, the right to be informed about the nature of the research, and the right to withdraw from participation at any stage (Silverman, 2016). This ethical principle was addressed in the following ways: Firstly, prior to the commencement of data collection, all prospective participants were informed fully by emailing an information pack to them about the nature of the research, time commitments, and what participation would entail . Secondly, all potential participants were required to volunteer to ensure that participants took place of their own free will. Thirdly, all the participants were informed clearly that should they wish to withdraw from the study, they could do so at any time without reason, and all data collected from them would be destroyed. In addition to the information pack, all these points were outlined in the consent form (see Appendix G), which was explained verbally and given to all participants prior to the first meeting (Allan, 2016; Babbie, 2015). By addressing these points on several occasions, all participants were able to make an informed decision as to whether they would like to participate in the study; thus, the principle of autonomy was exercised.

3.8.3 Confidentiality

Allan (2016) describes confidentially as an individual's obligation to maintain others' privacy by not disclosing personal or private information obtained about them. As this area represents a notable concern, it requires measures to ensure to that these requirements are met. Babbie (2015) identifies several ways in which a better performance on the guarantee of confidentiality

can be achieved. One of the ways indicated is the removal of identifying information from data such as the transcripts utilised in this study. This took the form of removing names or other information such as gender, age, or the academic subjects the educators taught, which potentially could lead to their identification. In the place of this information, participants were given identification codes. In the case of the school, the pseudonym Parkfield High School was employed throughout, and all identifiers such as email addresses, telephone numbers, and addresses were removed from transcripts and other relevant documents. The transcripts, audio recordings were stored in an encrypted folder on my PC and will continue to be stored for a period of five years, after which they will be destroyed.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed discussion of the theoretical framework, research design, and methodology that informed this study. I discussed the social constructivist paradigm and its influence on my decision to adopt a qualitative case study design. The sampling and data collection strategies were then explored and aligned with my theoretical lens. Efforts to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the study and ethical considerations to minimise any potential harm to the study participants were outlined. In Chapter 4, the findings of this study are presented and discussed.

Chapter 4: Presenting the Data

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study guided by frequently occurring themes related to the research question: How have educators experienced learner-led policy change in a former Model C school?

In addition, the following sub questions were also explored to understand the contextual nature of the enquiry: How did educators initially experience the emergent student voice? What role did educators play in managing learner activism? Did educators believe that their voice was acknowledged fully in the process of policy change? What effect, if any, did the policy changes have on teaching and learning? What effect, if any, did the policy changes have on educator-learner relations? Lastly, what were the educators' views regarding the duty and or responsibility to provide student voice opportunities (SVOs)?

The data were obtained through semi-structured individual interviews, a focus group discussion, and field notes compiled by the researcher. The resulting data were then explored using thematic analysis, and these findings are presented in this chapter and supported by the inclusion of direct quotations of the participants. I have done this to honour and highlight the voices of the teachers, one of the key aims of this research project.

4.2 Participants, Settings and Procedures

As mentioned in 1.6.4 and 3.6, the participants in this study were educators employed at a former Model C school in the Western Cape. They were purposively sampled to meet criteria set for the study, which included having been employed at the research site for a minimum period of four years; the formation of diversity in terms of gender, age and ethnicity (where possible); and varying degrees of teaching and managerial experience. The latter was identified as a significant criterion because I was of the view this would provide rich and varied data related to the research topic.

To ensure continued ethical conduct, all identifying information was replaced by a simple code to protect the participants' right to anonymity (see 1.8 and 3.9.3.An example of the transcript of an interview is presented in Appendix A). The interviewer is referred to as DW throughout the individual interviews and focus group discussion. Participants were assigned gender-neutral pseudonyms, and gender-neutral pronouns were used to strengthen anonymity further. In the

focus group discussion, an 'F' was placed before the pseudonym to differentiate quotes from the individual interviews and the focus group respectively. In addition, the school was given the name Parkfield High School, and any other identifying information was deleted. This can also be seen in Appendix A. In addition, I included line numbers to access the original words of the speaker easily when I wanted to include them in the text.

4.3 Presentation of Themes

The data in the individual interviews and focus group discussion were collected over a period of three months. The interviews varied in duration and ranged between 40 and 60 minutes. The focus group discussion lasted for two hours. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim, read, re-read, and coded for emerging themes (see Appendix A through C). Subsequently, the data were organised into broader themes for further exploration (see Appendix C). The significance of themes was based on the frequency with which they occurred during the analysis. These themes offered insight into how the educators had experienced learner-led policy changes and included the areas of interest outlined in Table 7 below.

Table 7

Data Pertaining to the Main Themes and Sub Themes

Main Themes	Sub Themes Emerging from Category
Theme 1: Educators' perceptions of transformation and activism in former Model C schools	• Schools as microcosms • Addressing inequalities of the past. • The willingness to change • Applied democracy
Theme 2: Educators' perceptions of civic education	• More than just the syllabus • Whose responsibility is civic education
Theme 3: Positioning the student voice	• Searching for identity in challenging spaces • The potential of student voice opportunities (SVOs)
Theme 4: Educators' experiences of the student voice	• Negotiating power: teacher-student relations • Learning to guide learners
Theme 5: Acknowledging the educators' voice	• Negotiating educators' voices • The balancing act

Note: Table compiled by researcher.

To honour the voices of the participants, each of these themes is presented next with an emphasis placed on illustrating how the participants expressed these themes. To this end, the presentation is richly interspersed with quotations from the interview and focus group transcripts.

4.3.1 Educators' perceptions of transformation and activism in former Model C schools

Transformation is a word associated with change and evolution. Rather than rigidity, it suggests a desire to restructure, modify, or remodel (Malabou, 2008). In South Africa, this desire is etched into every sector and facet of society to achieve an equality which was void during most of the previous century. As discussed in Chapter 2, educational institutions at both secondary and tertiary levels are often at the centre of socio-political transformation. This theme sets out to describe the interrelatedness between secondary schools and that of greater society, as recognised by the participants.

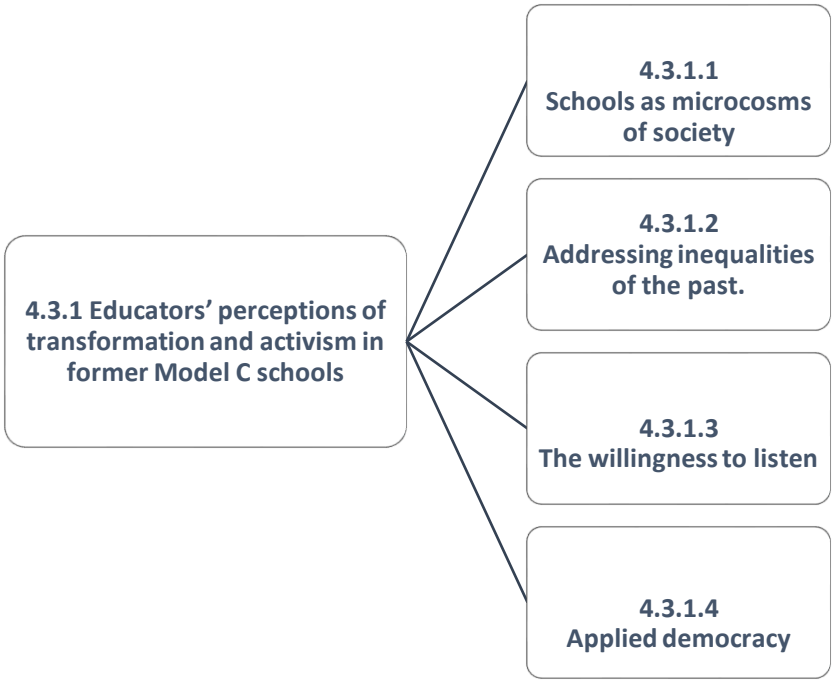


Figure 1. Overview of Educators' perceptions of transformation and activism in former Model C schools (4.3.1).

4.3.1.1 Schools as microcosms of society

The participants were of the view that witnessing the upsurge in student activism as seen in the *#Feesmustfall* and *#Rhodesmustfall* movements may have served to inspire students to exercise

their own voice. Some of them believed it was possible that students may have been inspired by having seen the change that was possible when young people stand together. They shared the view that being part of or sharing spaces with students involved in these movements, may have influenced learners' own views around what was happening in the broader society and at the school. This potential interrelatedness between schools and broader society is illustrated by the following view of Blain (note that pseudonyms are used for participants):

> *The fact that there are students at university who know students at school and vice versa, and they are talking to each other on social media… there definitely is a feed within each other in that aspect of it, so I definitely think it has an effect.* (Blain, lines 659-660)

Jaidyn shared this view and suggested that witnessing student activism in higher education settings may have had a significant influence on learners and how they started addressing challenges at school. Jaidyn shared that they thought that:

> *…there has been an affect from student protests, from things like #Feesmustfall and #Rhodesmustfall, I think that some of that activism has filtered down into schools, and I think some of the kids are taking those things seriously.* (Jaidyn, lines 2567-2568)

Jaidyn also shared that in her view, the effects of this activism infiltrated the broader school culture:

> *…some of the activism has filtered down into…the consciousness of teachers, school management and so on.* (Jaidyn, line 2569)

Andy elaborated on this view. He believed that the agenda of the activism became frustrating at times and possibly detracted from the ability of teachers to focus on teaching:

> *Yes, to the point of 'can we just not talk about this anymore'…if it doesn't influence my teaching directly or my subject, I really couldn't care less. Perhaps 'care less' is putting it a bit strongly, but you get what I'm saying.* (Andy, lines 2571-2575)

All the participants believed that the activism in higher education had influenced to varying degrees what they (the participants) saw happening at the schools. They shared that they recalled an increased perception that learners, teachers, governance, and the broader school community were paying closer attention to the growing student voice and reflecting on what it could possibly mean for them at school level. Blain recalled that there was an increasing acknowledgment that a learner and student voice was not new on the school and university

terrain; however, they believed that the growing tension at the time appeared to be invigorating a mounting expression of tensions and frustrations that may have remained simmering beneath the surface. Another participant, Jaidyn, reflected on their own days as a learner, sharing that:

> *there's an awareness of things that, as pupils, we definitely didn't have when we were at school, and there's a concern about things that are lacking. It might have been there (during my time) sort of, but it definitely wasn't as invigorated as it is now.* (Jaidyn, lines 2600-2602).

4.3.1.2 Addressing inequalities of the past.

Several of the participants shared the view that former Model C schools had the potential to continue legacies and traditions and may have accumulated wealth. They shared that they believed that this might serve to increase the divide between these schools and other less resourced schools. Most of the participants expressed concern that failure to address historical inequalities continued to present barriers to inclusivity. They expressed the view that, despite efforts to address racial demographics that were not reflective of the larger population, these efforts might not have encouraged a change in the organisational culture. Jaidyn reflected as follows:

> *…the history of the school is significant; so it [Parkfield] is a former Model C school, so it used to be a whites-only school. Those demographics are changing, but obviously it still carries that legacy with it.* (Jaidyn, lines 2433-2434).

This perception of how legacy and historical taken-for-granted customs and traditions had the potential to hinder inclusivity was explored further in the focus group discussion. Some participants expressed strong views related to the importance of acknowledging how too narrow a focus on a singular school in the current educational context of South Africa had the potential to create a greater divide along historical lines. For example, in the focus group discussion, Jaidyn shared the view that former Model C schools run the risk of

> *…becoming more and more islands of their isolation of their excellence; you know, we have more and more capital growth and wealth and it just puts a bigger divide…* (F: Jaidyn, lines 850-852).

While the participants acknowledged this, many believed that it was a complex phenomenon that required a significant shift in thinking throughout the school community. Some of the

participants believed that it would be remise of the group not to acknowledge that schools and this school in particular had applied its collective mind to developing strategies for addressing this challenge. Suri spoke of the strategy to address the demographic composition of learners and staff by means of a strategy that involved the recruitment of learners and teachers from diverse backgrounds. Suri described the strategy as one in which the school tried

> *...very hard with our Grade 8 applications to increase the number of black children we take in, because obviously that's our smallest demographic. So, we really do try there. I do know as well that as far as replacing teachers go, that there is an effort made to get teachers of colour, because that's also seriously lacking.* (Suri, lines 1897-1901)

Some of the participants supported this strategy and, like Dom, believed that

> *...when acceptances are made in Grade 8, I think an effort is made to provide diversity and to be inclusive.* (Dom, lines 945-957)

However, not all the participants believed that the efforts made by the school to address diversity and inclusivity were adequate. Perry held a more critical view of Parkfield's attempt in addressing specifically race-based diversity, and shared the following:

> *I don't think Parkfield is tackling (transformation) heavy enough and hard enough in that regard; it seems to not have a policy direction in regards to what their expectation for racial transformation is, but then there's also the issue of when we speak about transformation and progressiveness. Do we need to limit to the category of race?* (Perry, lines 2771-2775)

Many in the group did not agree with this view and believed that the efforts of the school regarding transformation, whilst not where it should be, had made great strides in attempting to establish Parkfield as an inclusive space that is welcoming and conducive to change. To this end, Perry shared that the primary ethos of the school was to create:

> *a safe environment for learners and students from a variety of backgrounds, and strives to incubate an open and communicative environment amongst students.* (Perry, lines 2709-2710)

While not all participants agreed about the pace of transformation, Blain believed that having experienced the learner-led changes first-hand had convinced him that Parkfield was:

> *…open to change. Change is not necessarily a bad thing, and we don't have to be so scared of change. I understand that something new can be quite daunting and frightening, but until you try it, you never really know.* (Blain, lines 911-913)

4.3.1.3 The willingness to listen

This section reports on the participants' reflections on the willingness of management, staff, and institutional culture to acknowledge the changing needs of an increasingly diverse learner cohort. The participants shared their perceptions and experiences of the willingness of former Model C schools to engage in a process of transformation. All the participants acknowledged that this was a complex process without a generic solution. However, all of them agreed that for meaningful and sustainable change to occur, the management and teachers had to acknowledge the learners' voices in the process. The participants agreed that this entailed a conscious effort or willingness on the part of all stakeholders associated with the school to engage in open and often courageous dialogue. They cited various reasons for this, and prominent among these was the importance of having a shared agenda to drive change. Blain stated that:

> *…there must be a willingness on the part of the school and the teachers involved. So, if you've got members on the staff who are fully into it [transformation] and buy into it and are pushing it, then that will happen.* (Blain, lines 216-219)

The following statement by Blain illustrates the importance the participants attached to the need for partnership and communication in bringing about change:

> *Yes, we're willing to listen to certain things. I think there must be a partnership, there has to be a partnership, and I think that partnership is quite difficult.* (Blain, lines 270-272)

Most of the participants shared the view that the willingness of schools to consider issues of transformation primarily manifested through their willingness to listen and engage in dialogue. This, Perry suggested, reflects "the idea of growing mutual respect through conversation and communication" (line 2792). This view echoes the importance of partnership and emerged again in the focus group with F: Jaidyn recounting how discussions held amongst the learners and subsequently with management, led to tangible changes as the process "opened up (the concerns of learners) to parents, staff and (other) learners" (line 226). Some of the participants believed it was particularly important to create spaces for the learners to rehearse their voice;

their physical and socio-political voice to grow their confidence. Suri drew particular attention to the importance of not suppressing the learner voice:

> *You don't want to squash the student's voice because then we are not listening to the students.* (Suri, line 1296)

This view was shared by other participants who believed that in honouring learners' views, one engenders the notion of schools as democratic spaces.

4.3.1.4 Applied democracy

The values inherent in the school culture played a significant role in opening the space for the learner-led policy change. All the participants shared a common understanding of school-based democracy. Parkfield shared the view that democracy suggests collaboration between all stakeholders of the school to promote the shared ideals and ethos of the wider school community. The participants' responses suggest that Parkfield was working at establishing a culture that valued and encouraged the diverse voices of its stakeholders. Jaidyn recalled the 2016 uniform and jewellery policy created a platform for learners to exercise their efficacy around school-specific and broader social challenges. He stated that changes occurred,

> *starting with the uniform changes, which was initially by students; they came with a proposal, I think, in light of much larger social changes globally and locally, through media and such influenced by these ideas… students, with strong leadership came forward and said, "We would like to propose this..."* (F: Jaidyn, lines 222-226)

Other participants acknowledged this emergent learner efficacy. They recalled the various ways in which students shared their views:

> *Most of them [policy requests] will come via a written proposal.* (Blain, Line 506)

> *They don't necessarily realise…how seriously the school is trying to take their proposals.* (Dom, line 834)

> *So, kids can also raise their own proposals.* (Suri, line 1376)

Dom and some of the other participants concurred that the learner's concerns appeared to be taken seriously, as they often elicited in-depth discussions among senior management. Jaidyn, who served on the board of governors as the teacher representative at the time, afforded this glimpse into how this process of facilitating meaning making unfolded at the time:

> *[After proposal submissions] ...and then it came to the discussions of the management, who discussed it, and then through democratic processes of votes, which I think was opened up to parents, staff and students. It was decided based on that system, and it's through that mechanism they came to the change to allow students to change uniform, or dress or whatever in their uniform sex they chose.* (F: Jaidyn, Lines 227-231).

Some of the participants shared that the way the learners conducted themselves was a significant factor that influenced the willingness of staff to engage in discussion that enabled democratic decision making. In Perry's words, the process

> *worked so well because it was done, I believe, respectfully by the pupils and there was consultation.* (F: Perry, line 283).

Thus, from the data, it appears that educators and managers' perspectives of being respected played a significant role in how they experienced the learner-driven initiative. In the following quote, Suri sums up this view that learners' ability to engage in what they deemed to be effective and respectful communication played a significant role in the process:

> *Because of the way that they [the learners] presented themselves, management believed that we could meet them halfway*. (Suri, line 1446).

This view is reinforced by Perry's use of the terms 'positive' and 'constructive' when describing how the learners were able to bring their ideas across (Perry, line 2282).

A common thread in the data suggests that the principle of democracy, as experienced in the Parkfield context, is one that values respect, disciplined adherence to the established procedures, and effective communication by all parties.

4.3.2 Educators' perceptions of civic education (CE)

As outlined in the literature review, civic education (CE) refers to knowledge that equips learners with an understanding of how democratic principles work and assists individuals in acquiring the skills and behaviour necessary for participating in governance. This includes but is not limited to meeting procedures and etiquette, collaboration, and engagement within a democratic framework (Youniss et al., 2002). The following sub themes present the views of the participants regarding the need and composition of CE and how it is acquired.

Figure 2. Overview of educators' perceptions of civic education (4.3.2).

4.3.2.1 More than just the syllabus

Most of the participants agreed that despite efforts by national government to increase equality in the public school system over the last three decades, in reality, education is still plagued by grave inequalities. In this sub theme, the views of participants concerning the adequacy of the current syllabus and formalised curriculum to equip learners for active citizenship or engagement in civil society are discussed. Some of the participants attributed this to the slow rate of change in educational transformation. Suri reflected as follows:

> *Since apartheid, you know, not much has changed. I think the only thing we're doing within that system that may be a little different is encouraging the kids to think critically, and to bring in more than just the syllabus.* (Suri, lines 1335-1337)

Blain supported this view and when asked to share what the educators meant when they spoke of education being 'more than just the syllabus', agreed that there was a need to 'add depth' (Blain, line 1764). This notion of 'depth' is viewed as schools needing to incorporate the teaching of skills for life, that, while not a part of the formal Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), are equally pivotal to the provision of a well-rounded education. Perry shared this view and suggested the following:

> *If all we constitute education to be is academics, then we're not really preparing our children for the future and for being an inclusive, socially well-rounded student.* (Perry, lines 2901-2903)

Thus, all the participants shared the view that there was a need for facilitating teaching and learning in ways that encouraged learners' education to extend beyond a narrow focus on academics. They were of the view that while the focus on the formal curriculum was of paramount importance, it was equally important that schools should become spaces where learners develop skills and knowledge related to life beyond formal schooling. Perry's view, reflected below, captures the participants' view on this matter.

> *From a pedagogical point of view, it (student voice platforms) teaches them (learners) open communication and respect, and while disagreements of opinion occur, at least it's a constructive environment in which to commune.* (Perry, lines 2159-2161).

Some of the participants related that the efforts made by Parkfield to engender this view of education were reflected in the efforts made to provide social education in which its learners could be active citizens equipped with the knowledge required to live and function in an inclusive society. According to Blain, at the school,

> *...we want to reflect and prepare our students for what society has to offer, not educate them in the system and then they go out there and go, "Well that's nothing like what we experienced." What's the point in that?* (Blain, lines 499-501)

Perry similarly reflected this view and linked it to a larger social responsibility on the part of the learners, who would inevitably:

> *emerge into a bigger world of heightened political engagement, both locally and globally and ... prepare(-ing) them for such endeavours or environments in other schools is important.* (Perry, lines 2157-2158)

In addition, the participants shared the importance of having structures in place that provide a platform for students to gain life experience in a way that they might not have, had these structures not been there. All the participants agreed that the school had been active in establishing the mechanisms that were required to engender CE.

4.3.2.2 Whose responsibility is civic education?

The previous sub theme presented the widely held view in favour of providing CE. However, there were participants who wondered, if CE is identified as an important part of adolescent education yet remains outside the scope of the formal curriculum, who would take primary responsibility for setting it there? This then brings into question the various roles that

management and educators play in creating school as an enabling space. Some of the participants, while recognising the value of CE, still believed the question of whether schools should be responsible for providing CE required further exploration. This sub theme shares the views of participants pertaining to this question.

Some of the participants, like Dom, expressed the view that schools as a collective harbour a responsibility to provide CE. Furthermore, they justified this position by suggesting that CE was a means by which learners not only could have a voice but also provide a vehicle for learners from diverse backgrounds to challenge the taken-for-granted systemic structures or traditions at former Model C schools:

> *I think they [schools] do because things do change, and it is important for the children to have some way of having a voice. I think a place like Parkfield, and maybe even more so some of the older, traditional schools… the traditions are hard to break, and hard to change.* (Dom, lines 866-869)

While the participants suggested that former Model C schools presented with particular challenges, they were of the view that CE in South Africa required a more holistic view that encompassed schools beyond the former Model C label. However, Jaidyn cautioned that delegating the responsibility of CE to schools harbours challenges, particularly when schools lack the resources needed or have a myriad of other issues they need to attend to. Jaidyn raised the issue of the professional becoming personal as follows:

> *There's a part of me that wants to say even if your situation at school is difficult, you should be doing those things, and pupils must have that experience and they should be conscientized, but I also don't want to, from a position of luxury say, "Yeah well, you should be doing that, why aren't you?" When there are many schools trying to deal with very basic things, and just get fundamental things right.* (Jaidyn, lines 2649-2654)

Suri also alluded to this conundrum of challenges when reflecting on schools' responsibility to provide opportunities for CE:

> *I think its hell-of-a difficult in some situations, though, because they're [less-resourced schools] dealing with far bigger problems, or far more-often-occurring problems than what we [Parkfield] have to deal with. So, I think it's hell-of-a difficult, but I do think to a degree a school has that responsibility.* (Suri, lines 1408-1411)

The notion of shared responsibility was shared by other participants, who reflected that the challenges may relate not only to external stakeholders but also to institution-based challenges around management and organisational practices like communication strategies. They identified these as key variables that needed to be addressed when considering CE. For instance, when they were asked what advice they would share with other schools that were considering adopting similar means to incorporating CE, Perry stressed the importance of communication:

> *There's a requirement of communication from senior management and staff themselves to be open to conversation, but with an authoritative position that mustn't be over-run and 'demands' made, but rather an educational tool that they can describe and say, "This is the mechanism that we're going to use," and students learn how to communicate better, and through that you're teaching respect of communication.* (Perry, lines 2384-2389)

The participants shared the view that education needs to extend the boundaries of formal curriculum to include aspects that adequately address real-world challenges experienced by the youth of South Africa. In addition, it appeared that the participants believed that civic education provides a further purpose in its ability to create spaces of belonging.

4.3.3 Positioning the student voice

The concept of belonging, acceptance, and the value of one's voice was a point of discussion that underpinned many of the participants' views regarding pedagogy. To present these views adequately, two prevalent sub themes were identified. The first involved the link between identity and belonging, and the second presented the means used and the challenges encountered by the participants in creating spaces where learners experience a sense of belonging.

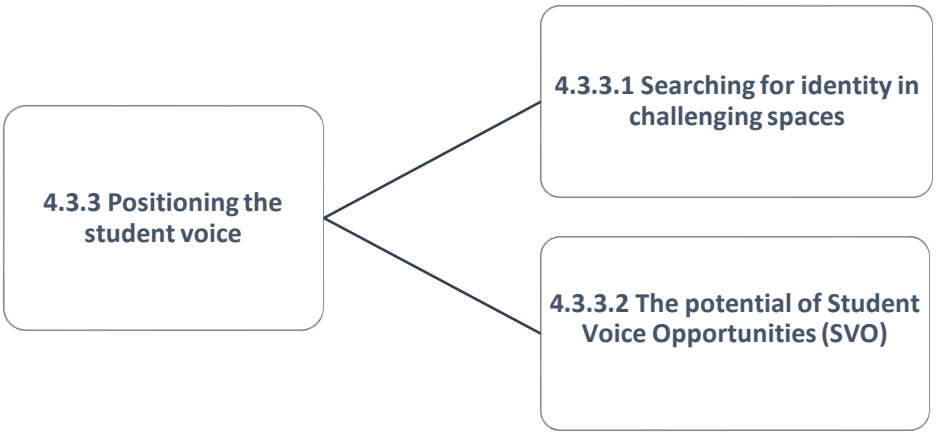


Figure 3. Overview of positioning the student voice (4.3.3).

4.3.3.1 Searching for identity in challenging spaces

Most of the participants readily shared their perceptions about what presented challenges when supporting learners from diverse backgrounds in exploring their identity. These participants also agreed that the systemic structures found at Parkfield, such as culture, history, language, and race, appeared to play a significant role in their learners' ability to feel a shared sense of identity with the institution. Dom's beliefs about Parkfield's ability to provide spaces in which learners can feel accepted, shared below, reflect the view shared by most of the participants:

> *Yeah everybody can find a place to belong. I mean, I think it [Parkfield] is very accepting, and I know of students who have come from other schools where they have felt excluded and uncomfortable and not accepted, and I think Parkfield has accepted people.* (Dom, lines 758-760).

However, while this view was shared by most participants, Blain expressed a more cautious view of Parkfield's ability to create a sense of belonging, particularly for people of colour:

> *The sense of belonging is tricky for students of colour coming to Parkfield, and I'm not sure whether they truly feel like they belong because often the Parkfield environment is very different from what they've experienced, and I think we've battled with that quite a bit. There's definitely a sense of alienation from students of colour feeling like they don't fit, or the school doesn't reflect them as much as it should. There's that whole concept of cultural assimilation, and whether we allow for the diversity or if we try to make kids fit in to our vision or our picture.* (Blain, lines 28-36)

Andy believed that while Parkfield sought to be inclusive, it was often a complex process. He shared an experience involving a learner who challenged and differed from the notion of the school as an inclusive space. He shared the learner's view as follows:

> *…that Parkfield thinks it's always so inclusive, but he said that the people who struggle the most with Parkfield are those who don't do well academically. So they say if you go to Parkfield it is expected from you to do well academically and if you don't then you are on the outside.* (Andy, lines 664-668)

In addition to academic performance, various participants identified the questioning traditional beliefs about gender binarism (the classification of two distinct genders) as a challenging issue Parkfield needed to navigate to become a more inclusive space.

> *We did many pro-gros [professional growth sessions] on this [gender fluidity] and we had people coming to chat about why it's important to have gender-neutral options, and explained to us the psychology behind kids who are trans or fluid or don't really know where they are; that was very interesting for me because it helped me to understand that sort of group of people, or why it's needed.* (Andy, lines 1923-1926)

From the views shared with the participants regarding what constitutes an inclusive space, it appears that educators and management are challenged on personal and professional levels to address these. In the process, the traditional institutional values and practices are often held up to scrutiny that requires creative and dynamic responses. One of these responses was to open spaces for the student voice to be acknowledged.

4.3.3.2 The potential of student voice opportunities (SVOs)

Finding or developing one's sense of identity in challenging spaces, as presented in 4.3.3.1, led to further discussions regarding the potential of student voice opportunities. Some of the participants shared the view that various learner groups found it more challenging than their peers to find a sense of belonging at Parkfield. Consequently, many of these learners had taken steps to initiate forums in which they could have a voice in sharing their experiences and influence the way in which action could be taken to create school as a more inclusive space.

Blain identified one such forum, called the People of Colour Forum, which provided a space in which learners of colour could meet and voice their shared experiences in a contained space. Blain shared the following:

> *… People of Colour (POC) Forum; I think that's a safe space for students of colour in the school to express things that they're dealing with, you know, it's not a court or whatever, it's not particularly to raise issues, but to speak freely.* (Blain, lines 154-157)

Part of this process, as mentioned by Blain, was that despite this forum only being open to people of colour, it served a bigger purpose of generating conversations and opportunities for discussions to take place among the wider learner body. Blain believed that these conversations may not have materialised otherwise if it had not been for this forum:

> *Last year, I had a math literacy class where I had a number of students of colour in that class, who were quite outspoken in the People of Colour Forum, and I took it upon myself to tackle the issues with them, and I made myself vulnerable in front of them, and I think they responded very positively about that. So, it's definitely changed.* (Blain, lines 693-697)

This view was shared by Suri; however, she suggested that the forum could do more to facilitate a process that helps the learner body and broader school community to understand the challenges confronting people of colour as a minority group. This is reflected in the following excerpt from her interview:

> *Yes, and at the moment for me, that forum [POC] could possibly be doing more; because at the moment it really just is a safe space for people of colour to speak, but I think at some point they have to cross over where we can engage the rest of the school in the way that they're feeling.* (Suri, lines 1308-1311)

One of the participants believed that creating the People of Colour Forum opened the door for other learners with shared experiences to get together around common interests. Another of these forums is the Plus Forum (for learners with diverse sexuality and gender identity-based cultures):

> *The Plus Forum, I think that's excellent. I certainly believe the school has become much more aware of gender, transgender-type issues. I'm being very "awoke", and I don't even know if I'm using that word correctly.* (Blain, lines 169-171)

On the back of these forums, others emerged in the school space. Suri spoke of groups related to various mental health concerns:

> *What's been repeated now is requests to have open spaces for kids who do suffer from anxiety and depression. So, we're looking at ways in which we can, maybe in a less formal way, just invite anyone who is interested to come and talk about this.* (Suri, lines 1377-1379)

In addition to the forums set up to provide learners with an opportunity to express themselves, all the participants agreed that Parkfield's management also utilised varied lines of communication that encouraged learner input on any decisions that maybe affect learners. One such initiative, according to the participants, is by creating a communication pathway that

invites submission of written proposals from learners directly to school management. These proposals, according to the participants, tend to centre on learner-related concerns. The participants agreed this formed the backdrop against which the 2016 uniform and jewellery policy changes where initiated.

Over time, these platforms extended beyond socio-political concerns to subject additions. Dom explained that this form of learner-led involvement was responsible for the addition of Information Technology (IT) as a subject. According to Blain, the process really highlights the important role of learner involvement as follows:

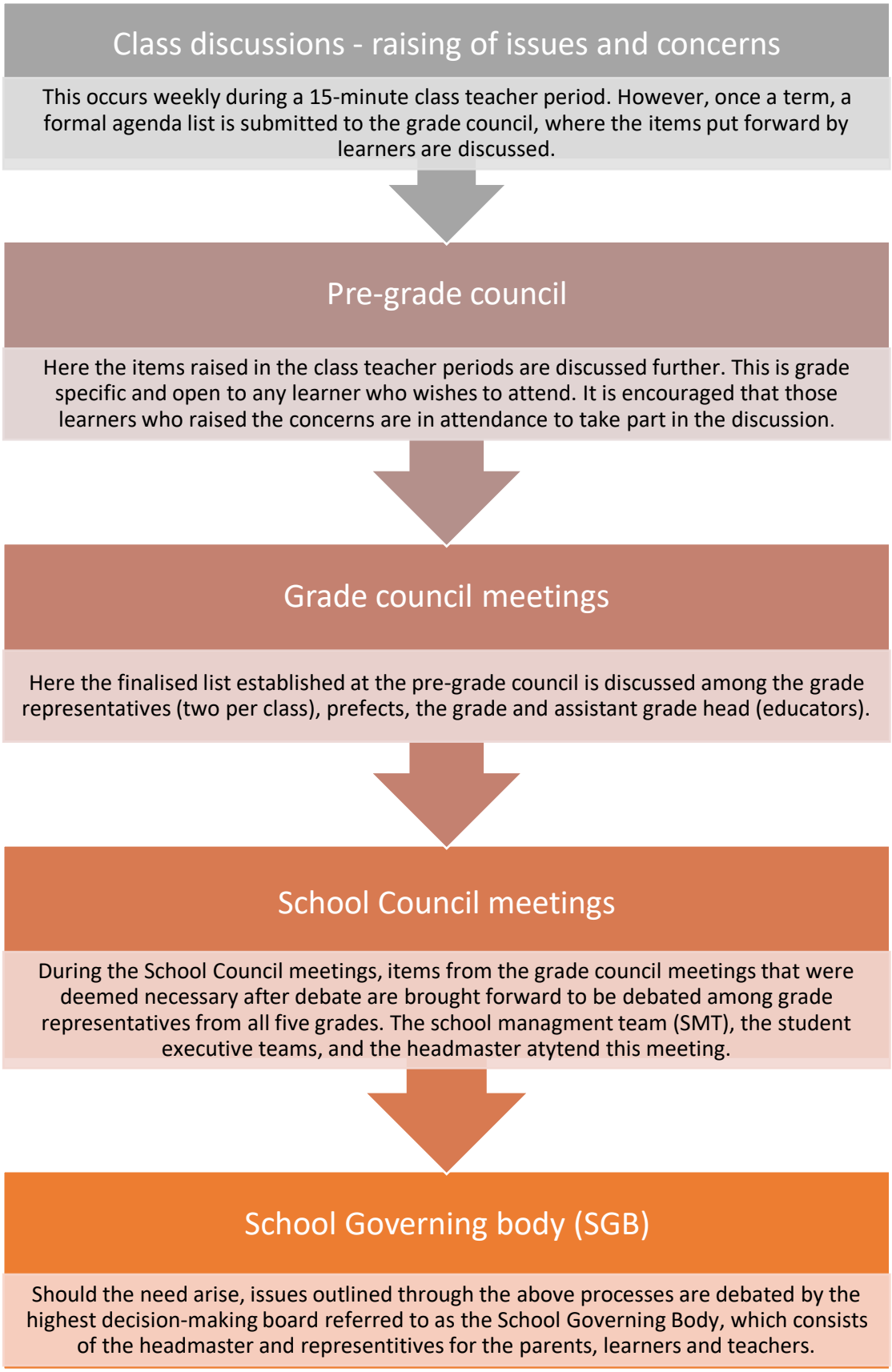
> *That [proposal for the inclusion of IT as a subject] came from the pupils, and a brilliant proposal, written and read out at School Council by two or three Grade 10 or Grade 11 kids. I mean they're 15/16 years old; they're affecting policy change at the school.* (Blain, lines 522-524)

The aforementioned illustrates the participants' view that learners' voices are important to ensure education remains responsive to the psychosocial and educational needs of learners.

Table 8 on the next page illustrates the current structure for the learner council as outlined by various educators during the interview process.

Table 8

Learner Council Processes



According to Suri, the processes outlined in Table 8 had been adjusted over the years and were not without their challenges. Furthermore, Suri suggested that the process could be slow and believed that there were quicker ways in which the process could be streamlined (line 1372). Despite this, the shared view by most of the participants was that the structure was functional and designed in such a way that all learners, to varying degrees, could participate, should they wish to.

4.3.4 Educators' experiences of the student voice

The previous sub themes have attempted to present the precipitating contextual experiences of participants that culminated in the 2016 learner-led policy changes. This sub theme shifts the focus and endeavours to present the shared experiences of participants during and after the policy changes. This was of particular interest as, according to some of the participants, this was a time marked by challenging power dynamics between learners and educators.

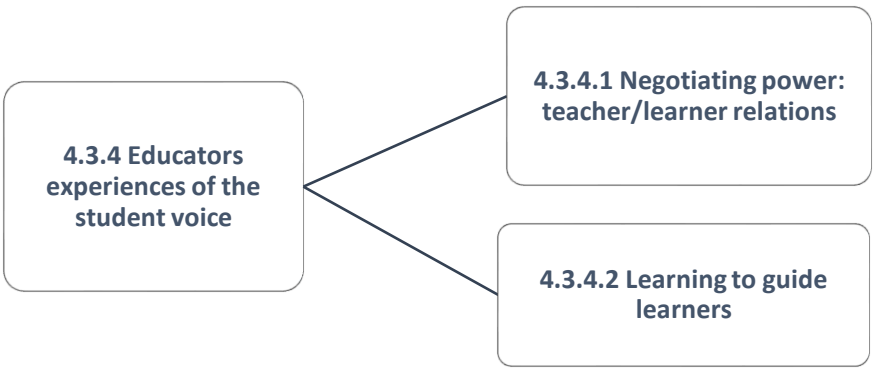


Figure 4. Overview of educators' experiences of the student voice (4.3.4).

4.3.4.1 Negotiating power: teacher-learner relations

When dealing with the theme of power during the focus group discussion, participants were asked whether conventional wisdom such as the expression "children should be seen and not heard" (DW, lines 20-22), had any place at Parkfield. The participants uniformly agreed that this line of thinking was not adhered to at Parkfield and furthermore that this was seemingly incompatible with the desire to build communication and collaboration between learners and educators. This was illustrated by Blain's comment while at the same time bringing into focus the question of boundaries between learner and teacher power:

> *I don't think keeping kids quiet, you know 'seen and not heard', I don't think that's a very good policy at all; I don't think that makes for a very conducive education environment, but also where do you, then, draw the line, you know?* (F: Blain, lines 32-34)

When asked to elaborate, Blain mentioned that recent challenges with learners had resulted in numerous staff discussions about changing learner behaviour:

> *I wonder how that [managing SVOs] relates to some of the things that we've been speaking about recently, about to what extent do you give children the voice, and at what point does it become too much. I guess in some way, that suddenly kids are dictating school policy.* (Blain, lines 34-37)

Speaking specifically of the policy changes in 2016, Perry appeared to share similar sentiments and suggested that some educators seemed to have experienced frustration with the way in which they believed their opinions with regard to the policy changes were handled. Perry contributed the following:

> *I think, a lot of them [educators] felt challenged by the students, and they were being undermined in their authoritative position, and I think that came through in some frustration that they felt that their voice was being overburdened or overwhelmed by the students.* (F: Perry, lines 2357-2360)

However, not all the participants shared this view. Jaidyn was not of the view that their voice had been undermined. However, the participants acknowledged that several of their colleagues did in fact feel this way and that these feelings might have influenced how certain teachers were able to relate to their learners in the classroom:

> *I'm sure that how teachers felt about those things (gender norms) also fed into how they felt about what was happening here [potential policy change], and if you were a teacher who had the general sense of "everything is going crazy; students are just demanding what they want and there's no respect", then that ties into how you see what's happening.* (Perry, lines 2719-2723)

While acknowledging the view shared by Jaidyn, Suri agreed with Perry that

> *…though [they] think that some teachers feel that the kids are entitled; that the kids demand and management gives. But I don't believe that's true.* (Suri, lines 1553-1554)

Most of the participants agreed that some level of frustration had occurred among the teachers; however, this was a minority view. Dom alluded to this when they explained the following:

> *Just in terms of student-voice vs. teacher-voice, I don't know if that is the kind of conflict that there is I think… there's been both student and teacher input, and I don't think one has detracted from the other.* (F: Dom, line 1262)

The views presented above suggest that educators are confronted by various challenges related to the developmental stage of adolescence. While no definitive view emerged, it appears that most of the participants agreed that finding a balance between providing SVOs and guiding young learners was needed to mitigate potential relational power challenges.

4.3.4.2 Learning to guide learners

How teachers related to learners and learners related to teachers shifted. One of the most frequently occurring themes in the data relayed the need for 'learner guidance'. This, according to the participants, is a term related to the perceptions educators held about their roles and responsibilities in facilitating SVOs. Therefore, this sub theme reflects on the participants' experiences of the provision of SVOs, as well as the participants' views about the continued discussion about the topics raised by the learners in the aforementioned forums.

Regarding the question of the responsibility of the school (and by extension educators) to provide opportunities for the learner voice to be acknowledged, many of the participants agreed that they considered it part of their duty as educators. However, the participants shared that the learners (adolescents) also had to exercise responsibility in how they conducted themselves and honoured the agreements that emerged because of their proposals. Some of the participants were of the view that learners were not always able to accept responsibility for ensuring the consistent application of the agreements. Perry reflected on the shared responsibility of educators and learners, and his view illustrated what appeared as a challenge of weakened learner responsibility in that they believed some learners, lacked the follow-through needed in the wake of student voice opportunities:

> *I think I do feel an obligation to do that [provide SVOs] but…I think about the climate strike protest, the gender-based violence protests; our kids love…putting it out there in the public and I don't know how much of it is carried down to their normal, everyday behaviour at school… I say you've got to carry it on, you can't expect staff to keep putting things on for you to carry it on. If you hear people on the playground [toxic masculinity],*

> *you've got to carry it on…I think that's where we need to navigate more, is that it doesn't have to be a show and it doesn't have to be something that's continually given to you; platforms… public platforms it's about what are you doing on the ground.* (F: Perry, lines 366-380).

Several participants shared this concern regarding learner follow-through. Andy added that, where issues were brought to the fore, the discussion needed to be ongoing:

> *I agree that I think that I feel we have an obligation to do that [provide SVOs]. I certainly believe I have an obligation to do that…I think perhaps what needs to happen is…when there is a protest, it [discussions] becomes an ongoing thing.* (Andy, lines 452-456)

Andy further suggested that SVOs should not be a platform for emotionally fuelled protests that lack the longevity to see sustainable change.

Blain also picked up this apparent lack of follow-through and shared an interesting anecdote related to this. He described an experience whereby learners, in the wake of the recent gender-based violence protests, had made jokes in bad taste and then proceeded to play a sexually suggestive song at a public Parkfield High School water polo match. According to Blain, the song objectified women and flew in the face of everything the learners were appealing for in their protests:

> *I went and I said, "You know, you can't protest in the road against gender-based violence and then play songs where women are made out as objects that are used for men's pleasure and then discarded, you know, you can't do that. So, you have to make a choice."* (Blain, lines 392-396).

In a similar account, Andy expressed his dismay at the number of learners who attended the learner-led climate strike but then failed to apply the same principles in the school.

> *Yeah, and you know, the same thing with the climate strike, like, fine go yes! But pick up the papers in the class, pick up the papers that's on the… recycle properly, go out and recycle everything in the bin where it should go, so I mean again, like it's all nice, but do they really understand how to change things instead of just protesting?* (Andy, lines 402-405).

A view shared by most of the participants was that these opportunities for learners to exercise their voice appear to lose their educational value if they are used simply to draw attention to an issue without any intention of creating sustainable change.

4.3.5 Educators' experiences of their own voice

The participants were of the view that the provision of SVOs brought with it an added layer of teacher responsibility. All the participants raised concerns about the way in which this had affected teachers' workloads and consequently their mental health. A view shared by several participants was that high-functioning schools such as Parkfield are continually striving to increase their educational value by adding facilities, resources, and initiatives. All the participants agreed that whilst these additions contribute greatly to a well-rounded education, they also have the potential to take their toll on the educators who are tasked with managing them. Perry highlighted this and spoke of the roles and responsibilities of teachers in facilitating SVOs:

> *Somebody's got to manage it. It's a school, so any gathering, I guess, in some ways, has to be, not monitored, but supervised by an adult. So yes, you've got to be involved in there; someone's got to be involved.* (Perry, lines 317-319)

The following sub themes endeavour to present the participants' personal experiences of the extent to which they believed their voices had been acknowledged in the change process and how this influenced the way in which they balanced the unfolding change process with an ever-increasing load of teaching responsibility. Furthermore, it is important to note that this overarching theme marks a point of departure in the discussion as we navigated away from the emphasis on educators' experiences *prior* to the learner-led policy changes and shift to a focus on experiences that *coincided with or occurred after* the changes.

Figure 5. Overview of Educators' experiences of their own voice (4.3.5).

4.3.5.1 Negotiating the educators' voice

According to the participants, the learner-led policy changes of 2016 occurred at a time when significant conversations were held with various stakeholders, and when the voices of educators in negotiations were represented largely by the school management team. The participants were of the view that the way in which the negotiations were handled was significant and is of interest here, as they suggested it had a bearing on teacher well-being. Participants recounted similarities in how they experienced the student-initiated review of uniform, jewellery, and hair policies during 2016. At the time, the learners initiated the policy review process because they viewed the policies as redundant, sexist, and marginalising. At the time, the learners said that they had initiated the move for policy change around these issues to establish Parkfield as a space that was more inclusive.

During the individual interviews and focus group discussion, the participants acknowledged that efforts had been made to encourage educator engagement from the outset. Various participants shared the following:

> *With big decisions like that [2016 policy change], it is definitely discussed in a staff meeting, at the Wednesday morning meeting.* (Blain, lines 607-608)

> *They did ask our opinions on it, many times, so we had long discussions about it amongst staff.* (F: Andy, lines 1916-1917)

> *That was brought forward by the students, and it was discussed amongst staff and students and parents, which led to a school policy change in which they instituted an allowance for boys and girls to wear their hair long.* (F: Perry, lines 2200-2203).

However, there were differing views about the extent to which educators' voices were acknowledged genuinely. The participants also differed about the appropriateness and effectiveness of the platforms that were used to engage with educators. This complexity is captured in the following comment:

> *I just don't know how effective that is [Wednesday morning staff meetings]. I know in a big group, some people might not be willing to speak out, for fear of being judged… when they're [educators] in the minority [of opinion], so they don't speak up. So, I sometimes wonder if we need to make… and sometimes there's those open-agenda staff meetings where people can come and raise that… but again, how empowered do staff feel to speak up when they don't agree with something? It's easy to speak up when you agree with something; when you don't agree with something, then it becomes quite hard.* (Blain, lines 609-619).

Dom echoed these sentiments and presented the following view on why people may not have disagreed with the spirit and method of engagement at the time:

> *…but it was very hard for any of the teachers to say, "I don't agree with this," because I think some other teachers were very for it [2016 policy change], and believed themselves to be so 'woke' and that those of us who were going to stand against it were just old-fashioned and 'unwoke'. So, it was quite hard to actually say something different, it is always hard in the staff room to say something different.* (Dom, lines 942-946)

Perry was one of the educators in favour of the policy changes to which Dom alluded. His view appears to confirm the concerns reflected above:

> *At first, there was an initial, amongst at least the elder generation of staff, a negative response in terms of, "Oh, who are the children to be demanding this, who are the children to be influencing change and questioning the status quo?" from the older staff. I know for myself and a number of other staff who were totally with it, I think, and supportive of the idea from the get go, because that's where I did perceive things to be moving, you know.* (Perry, lines 2254-2259).

Jaidyn, who was also in favour of the policy changes, mentioned that perceptions of potential bias from management may have contributed to the sense that not all voices were listened to equally and suggested the following:

> *[Those]who are more conservative in their views, who are not as liberal and open… not open-minded, that's a terrible thing to say, but that's just not the way that they perceive the world. I'm so aware of that today where we don't listen to people who we don't agree with; we only tend to talk to people who we agree with. It becomes a reinforcing loop.* (Jaidyn, lines 637-641).

The view shared above suggests that participants viewed staff members on a continuum of conservative to liberal. However, Andy added that while there might have been some who initially had reservations about the policy changes and questioned the attempt by management to listen genuinely, shifts in opinion did occur. He commented as follows:

> *I mean, often at Parkfield you get the feeling that yes, there is staff input, but I'm not so sure it is necessarily really listened to…. it was one of those things where I kind of got the feeling it doesn't really matter what, a decision is going to be made regardless of what we say.* (Andy, lines 1917-1918, 1927-1929)

While the views reflected above appear to be common, some participants believed the issue of having their views acknowledged was a personal one rather than the result of management failing to listen. Some of the participants said that they believed that

> *… [they] were listened to, whether they believed that they were listened to is a different position… I don't think that they were not listened to. We were encouraged to have conversations by our management and our leadership to talk to each other about this.* (Perry, lines 2352-2353, 2361-2363).

> *… there was a lot of opportunity to hear teacher voices. As I said, there were a lot of discussions that involved the full body of teachers; there was opportunity for a smaller group to meet separately and I was part of that, and people from different perspectives chose to involve themselves in that, so a variety of perspectives were heard. I do think there was a feeling amongst some teachers that their voices were not heard, I sort of don't think that that was valid.* (Jaidyn, lines 2736-2741).

The responses above highlight the differing opinions and the complex nature of the responses experienced by the educators when confronting transformation in this former Model C school. It appears to have been experienced as particularly challenging for participants who had a long history of involvement in institutions steeped in tradition and focused on maintaining the established organisational culture.

4.3.5.2 The balancing act

During discussions, it became apparent that 'wellness' was a loaded term at the centre of numerous discussions by staff. According to the participants, Parkfield management was aware of the importance of this area and the potential effect it had on the ability of staff members to function optimally. When asked about their own experiences in managing various portfolios during the focus group discussion, Blain had this to say:

> *I think that teacher burnout is a very real thing and I think at Parkfield in particular, we put pressure on ourselves because we know what we're here to do and what we want to achieve. We push our students; we're not very accommodating if our students don't perform well, because it's a reflection on how badly we are or whatever. We are then involved in sport and culture and service and camps in the holiday time and over the weekend, and slowly but surely your personal time becomes eroded.* (F: Blain, Lines 1103-1109)

> *There's always a group of kids or some enthusiastic teacher, which is not always a bad thing, obviously; enthusiasm, wanting to start something new or to expand something or create something and so for me, we just keep getting spread thinner and thinner and thinner and so, yes, I find that a very difficult thing.* (F: Blain, lines 1090-1094)

Several of the participants expressed this balancing act. While several participants expressed a desire to provide learners with as many opportunities for growth as possible, they were very conscious of the toll this often took on their energy and wellness. Relating this back to the policy change process, Perry shared the following:

> *[It's a] … hard thing to do when you're on the front line of all of these changes; they're fantastic, but it does put a tremendous toll on you.* (Perry, lines 310-313)

In a similar manner, while Jaidyn acknowledged the burden of time and energy that providing SVOs had had on teachers, he was still of the view that teachers play a pivotal role in transformation because

> *… it's maybe not resources so much as having the time and the energy, as teachers and management, to be able to support those structures and scaffolds.* (Jaidyn, lines 2658-2659)

From the views shared by the participants, it emerged that while learners were eager to drive change, educators often had to facilitate this. This involvement then ultimately affected the educators and their ability to find a balance in participating in this change process while ensuring that they remained focused on the academic endeavour. Jaidyn outlined this concern as follows:

> *I think that that process is quite tiring, even if it's positive; you know, teaching is tiring already, you're busy, and then it's an afternoon you have to go and have a 2- or 3-hour discussion about this thing. I think the process was quite trying for the teacher body in general, because of that extra time and energy and effort put into it.* (Jaidyn, lines 2700-2704)

Despite the challenges they faced, the participants were able to acknowledge the difficulties management could have been dealing with when attempting to address the matter while ensuring simultaneously that the school continued with the academic task. Dom stated that:

> *…it's quite a difficult thing for the school to deal with proactively. Unless the solution is that we need to reduce the number of duties, we need to reduce workloads in some ways, but then we returned to the issue of, well, how do you sustain the school in the way that it is if you reduce what's expected?* (Dom, lines 1127-1130)

Despite acknowledging the specific challenges faced by school management at the time, one of the participants believed that the school had not done enough to prioritise educators. When the participants were asked if they (the educators) had felt free to seek support from management when they felt overwhelmed, Blain responded as follows:

> *I've raised this and often the line that gets given back to me is that the needs of the school take priority.* (Blain, lines 1140-1141)

In addition, Blain expressed the opinion that Parkfield had become a "victim of its own success" (line 1571). This view possibly illustrates the school's record of success in seeking to produce well-rounded school leavers and the resultant expectations by learners and parents that the school attempted to do so, regardless of the cost to its staff.

4.4 Conclusion

The various themes highlighted in 4.3 are important avenues for exploration, particularly given the resurgence of the student voice and the subsequent drive to make schools across South Africa spaces that are more inclusive. Furthermore, it is important that we acknowledge the challenges and successes when schools embark on whole-school transformation processes. We should learn from their experiences by creating a space for the voices of the different stakeholders in the school community to emerge. The data presented here represent the experiences of the educators in one such space. It is important for us to acknowledge their voice, as they play a pivotal role in the functioning of the school and the management of learners' education.

This chapter presented the findings as shared by the participants in this study. The themes reflected their experiences of learner-initiated policy change at a former Model C school. From their reflections, key notions of civic education as part of the covert curriculum, positioning the student voice in the context of the school, the influence of SVOs in adolescent identity formation, the power dynamics between educators and learners, and educator wellness emerged as key variables to be considered in school-based transformation.

The following chapter provides a discussion of the findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5: Findings, Limitations and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The aim of the research study was to gain deeper insight into the participants' experiences and perceptions of learner-led policy change. The participants in this study were selected purposefully from a population of educators who were working at Parkview High at the time and who had assisted in creating or facilitating opportunities for students' voices to be heard in the policy change process. The process and its effects were complex; therefore, this discussion acknowledges that not all aspects were addressed in this study. Instead, several areas of interest were examined as they pertained to the research questions. I positioned my study in the social constructivist paradigm, as I was interested in the meaning making of the participants as they interacted with the phenomenon under study. I used a qualitative approach with a case study research design, which created an opportunity for me to gain insight into the experiences of the participants and their perceptions of the transformation process at Parkview High School in 2016. While I am no longer a member of staff at Parkview, I do think it is important at this stage to state again that I was an educator at the school at that time and therefore I am aware that there had been a wide range of responses to the process at the time. In Chapter 3, I detail the measures I put in place to mitigate potential bias. The context of the study was a former Model C school in the Western Cape. The data-collection process provided an opportunity to engage with educators who had first-hand experience of numerous learner-led policy changes. I used individual interviews, a focus group discussion, and field notes to triangulate the data and ensure trustworthiness. I used an iterative data analysis process and the NVivo software to assist me in the process. The initial conversations in the individual interviews resulted in a number of potential themes that were then discussed at greater length in the focus group discussion. Having adopted a social constructivist paradigm with which to view the data-collection process, it was important to acknowledge the differing perceptions and views that contributed to the process of making meaning. While commonalities were present, they were unique and individualised accounts that formed part of a greater narrative. The data were presented in Chapter 4.

In this chapter, I discuss the findings of my study and relate it to the literature review conducted in Chapter 2. In addition, the limitations of the study are discussed in this chapter, and recommendations for future research are proposed.

5.2 The Research Findings

This study was informed by a social constructivist approach and therefore sought to focus on experiences of the participants in relation to the context at the time. Contexts are relational and may change over time. This study aimed to explore the experiences and perceptions of teachers in relation to learner-led policy change at Parkview High School in 2016. It is important to understand that the views and experiences shared in this study relate to a very definite time frame and seek to address the research focus as outlined in Chapter 1. The expansive nature of this enquiry resulted in the emergence of several categories and themes (see Chapter 4). The following sections seek to present these in broad themes for discussion. These themes became the basis on which discussions of the following were explored: the acknowledgment of educators' voices, democracy, transformation and interconnectedness, moulding responsible citizens, forging identity through voice, and the educators' role in mediating the emerging student voice.

5.2.1 Acknowledging educators' voices

In this initial section, the discussion centres largely on how educators experienced the negotiation of their voice with subsequent discussions outlining the contextual factors contributing to these experiences. During the individual interviews and the focus group discussion, the theme of the teachers' voice featured regularly in primarily two discussion points, namely the acknowledgment of their voices by management during the learner-led policy changes and educator wellness, which appeared to be influenced by the level of responsibility expected from the educators.

5.2.1.1 Management and educators: Critical discussions

All participants believed that their voices were acknowledged during the policy changes in 2016, albeit to differing extents. The school management used numerous staff meetings and professional growth seminars to focus discussion on policy change. While participants acknowledged the effort, they highlighted a number of significant factors that affected the effectiveness of those meetings. Participants suggested that the group dynamics in large staff meetings had the potential to influence the extent to which educators were willing to share their views. One of the inhibiting factors identified by educators was the potential for some of the staff to feel a sense of inadvertent intimidation by their peers. Fear of being labelled as 'difficult' when disagreeing with the dominant view also served to inhibit free contribution in

these bigger meetings. Thus, the findings suggest that an element of peer pressure existed. Literature provides evidence suggesting that these types of challenges are often experienced within the context of educator meetings. (Menocal, 2014; Orange, 2018)

Another factor that influenced the extent to which participants engaged in these platforms relates to their perception of whether all voices were valued equally. A small number of participants shared that they believed a decision (with regard to the 2016 policy changes) had already been made before the meetings. While Mncube (2008) supports this view and seems to suggest a possible source of disempowerment of the educator voice, some of the participants presented a counter narrative suggesting that beyond the staff meetings and professional development seminars, there were further opportunities to meet, such as in smaller committees. This suggests that multiple avenues existed for educators to express their voice.

The findings highlight the complexities involved and suggest that it is unlikely to achieve a full consensus on issues related to policy change. It appears that, as with many institutional changes, it will be welcomed by some and rejected by others. While it is not my intention to make an argument for or against change, the findings and the literature (Fataar, 2018; Wray, Hellenberg & Hansen, 2018) suggest that in navigating the process of change, some discussions can be more productive than others. Discussion forums in which all individuals do not feel valued and listened to are likely to result in decisions that may limit the potential challenges. Having considered the findings, it appears that Parkfield made a considerable effort to engage all stakeholders consistently. However, as Dom mentioned, opening other avenues for communication may be a further way to empower educators who hold opinions that are considered alternatives to the dominant narrative. This is significant in redressing perceptions of inequality in the existing school culture.

5.2.1.2 Balancing responsibility and educator wellness

Participants raised educator wellness in relation to increased responsibility as another significant area of concern. In providing SVOs, educators commit themselves to going beyond the formal curriculum. According to the participants, this results in an increased workload because in “any gathering, someone has to manage it” (Blain, line 31). Workload and wellness are closely linked areas that are of great importance, as they have a direct effect on an educator’s enthusiasm levels in the classroom. As outlined in Chapter 2, this has implications for promoting positive development and achievement among learners and staff alike (Frenzel et al., 2009; Urbanski et al., 2017).

The findings suggest that the educators at Parkfield High School felt a great sense of pressure in relation to their roles. Blain suggested that much of this was self-imposed as they were aware of the high standards that had been obtained in the past and thus strove to maintain that high standard. However, Blain also acknowledged that over time, a growing list of responsibilities inevitably erodes one's personal time and possibly leads to educator burnout.

Several participants expressed the opinion that educators keep getting "spread thinner and thinner" (Blain, line 1090), which suggests that continually adding new opportunities for learners, whether through new sports, cultural opportunities, service avenues, or otherwise, is not sustainable. This highlights a conflict for many of the participants who on the one hand believed a willing obligation to provide learners with as many avenues as possible for growth while at the same time acknowledging that it takes a 'toll on you' (Andy, line 458). This appears to be particularly true in relation to policy changes, which often carry an emotionally charged element. Suri, a strong advocate for learner activism, acknowledged that these changes could be tiring for teachers because of the extra time, energy and effort required often after a long day of classroom teaching (Suri, line 2704). In essence, this suggests that while the benefits of SVOs in schools are acknowledged, they cannot be implemented at the expense of educator wellness. This appears to add credence to the view outlined by Quaglia and Lande (2016) in that, educators experiences add value in the change process as they possess an insider's knowledge of what works and what doesn't.

When asked about how management perceived this issue, the opinions differed greatly. One participant suggested that management's position was clear: the school's needs came first. This suggests that educators need to fit into whatever roles are required of them, and their interests are beneath that of the institution. However, others suggested that it was a more complex issue characterised by one participant's question, "How do you sustain the school in the way it is if you reduce what's expected?" (Dom, line 1130). This suggested that if educators' concerns were yielded to, it may reduce the opportunities provided and consequently devalue the school in the eyes of prospective parents and learners.

There was consensus suggesting that participants believed that management was approachable and willing to engage in dialogue over their concerns. However, views differed regarding whether these expressed concerns would or even could be addressed adequately. Certain participants believed that bringing concerns up was futile because, while they might be listened to, it was unlikely that anything would materialise.

The findings suggest that schools must be prepared to engage in discussion with their staff about the implications of adding extracurricular responsibilities such as SVOs to their portfolios. The addition of SVOs can be effective only if educators feel able to immerse themselves in the management of these areas. Likewise, this can occur only if educators do not feel as though they are being 'spread thinner' perpetually. The allocation of responsibilities is a complex task but one that has clear implications for educator wellness and efficient facilitation of SVOs.

5.2.2 Democracy, transformation, and interconnectedness

As outlined in the literature review, transformation is a word loaded with meaning in the South African landscape (South Africa, 1996). Since the start of democracy, plans to introduce transformation in numerous sectors have seen varied levels of success (Lebeloane, 2017; Van der Berg et al., 2016). It has been and continues to be an area of contention in schools and institutions of higher education. However, in the latter part of the last decade, the country witnessed a resurgence in the student voice and impatience about the pace of transformation in education, more particularly in tertiary institutions (Fataar, 2018). The findings of this study suggest that the involvement of young people in driving transformation is active and robust in the former Model C school on which this study is focused. This discussion shares the perspective of the participants, who are educators at one school and recounts their experiences as the school as an organisation attempted to grapple with learner-led calls for transformation of some of its policies.

The consensus among the participants was that while learner activism at Parkfield High School existed prior to the widely published #Feesmustfall and #Rhodesmustfall movements, the learners appeared to have been energised by the newly mobilised political student movement in the broader society. The participants were of the view that learners at Parkfield High School, like those at other schools, had learners with varying levels of socio-political consciousness. They suggested that learners construct meaning in different ways. Some of the ways in which learners make sense of the social world in the school context range from passageway conversations between classes to observing the ways in which their tertiary student counterparts champion social justice issues and how these are presented in the mainstream media and on social media.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) outlines this interconnectedness between societal systems at various levels in his bio-ecological theory of development. As suggested in 4.2.1.1, schools are

microcosms of society in that they model the societal shifts and transformation they witness beyond their immediate environment.

The participants' responses suggest that congruence exists between this literature and the participants' reflections on factors they believed might have energised the learners at their school at that time. as alluded to in 4.2.1.1, schools are microcosms of society in that they model the societal shifts and transformation they witness beyond their immediate environment.

However, it is important to note that neither the participants nor I presuppose that all learners will be equally motivated to involve themselves in matters of activism such as those which they have witnessed. However, as Jaidyn suggests, at very least, some of the kids were taking the matters of #Feesmustfall and #Rhodesmustfall 'very seriously' (F: Jaidyn, line 2562). Based on this understanding of what might have activated increased student activism at the time, it is important to consider how Parkfield High School attempted to navigate or negotiate the shifting student voice and to reflect on how the educators, as a key stakeholder group, experienced the approach of the school.

5.2.1.1 Active engagement: Educators' experiences

The findings illustrate several key points related to teachers' experiences of learner-led policy change. Some of the participants attributed the renewal of learner activism at the time to influence by events happening in the broader educational landscape but more specifically learners' increasing dissatisfaction with the slow pace of transformation regarding certain policy matters at Parkfield High School. This corresponds with the view shared by Fataar (2018) that dissatisfaction was a precursor to the process that culminated in calls for the decolonisation of education in South Africa.

Secondly, it appears that the willingness of educators to engage with the learners allowed the process to evolve constructively. Linked to this is the participants' collective view that the learner-led policy changes at Parkfield High School followed democratic processes. According to Mancini et al. (2015), this implies active engagement on the educators' part – a vital component in democratic school transformation. In addition, the promotion of active engagement suggests an approach by the educators that was characterised by an effort to allow, value, and respect the opinions of all parties. This corresponds with the democratic approach to transformation suggested by Wray et al. (2018).

5.2.1.1 Parkview and similarly positioned schools

Former Model C schools are often viewed as "islands of isolation" (Jaidyn, line 850). More specifically, there is a discourse that former Model C schools, which are now classified as quintile 5 schools, often stand in even greater isolation from the challenges of other schools because of the wealth they often accrue from the affluent fee-paying parent body. This has allowed schools like Parkfield High School to provide their learners and educators with better access to resources and additional school facilities. In addition, educator-learner ratios often are affected positively because the school can employ more educators than allocated by the Department of Education. Many of these educators are paid by the school governing body. While some consider it important for schools to seek to increase economic prosperity, such as that experienced by many quintile 5 schools, it is also important to understand that against the backdrop of a weakened economy and a high unemployment rate, their success has the potential to accentuate socio-economic disparity and potentially exclude learners from economically marginalized backgrounds. According to the literature, learners from these backgrounds who do manage to attend schools like Parkview High School through scholarship programmes may experience the school environment as marginalising. A study conducted by Wray et al. (2018) indicates that these learners, who are often learners of colour, experience a number of challenges in their attempt to find a sense of belonging in former Model C schools. Often, these challenges are not acknowledged overtly, and learners are expected to acculturate.

The participants acknowledged that there was very limited guidance from the Department of Basic Education to guide them in transforming schools into socially inclusive spaces. However, what appeared clear throughout the discussion and linked to the views espoused by Wray et al. (2018) was the acknowledgement that transformation begins with creating schools as spaces in which all learners experience a sense of belonging and feel that their opinions matter. The participants believed that Parkview High School had attempted to be responsive to these needs by creating or affording learners access to forums or other opportunities, which allowed minority learners to come together to discuss various experiences, challenges, and views that they believed warranted attention. Often, these were initiated by the learners but were supported and sustained because of an ongoing collaboration between the learners and educators. These, like the larger policy shifts that saw the revision of rules about hair, uniform, and jewellery, and the subsequent talks about decolonisation are part of ongoing discussions related to moving the school along a trajectory towards becoming a more inclusive space. This utilised the adolescent

need to exercise agency and encouraged greater transparency in decision making that pertained to learners in the school context (Cherry, 2018; Donald et al., 2014).

5.2.3 Above and beyond: Moulding responsible citizens

The covert or hidden curriculum was an element alluded to often during the individual interviews and focus group discussion. As opposed to the formal curriculum, commonly referred to as CAPS, the hidden curriculum encompasses learning that falls outside the planned curricula such as that observed in student-led forums.

The desire of Parkfield High School to extend beyond the formal curriculum and by doing so include aspects related to social, democratic, and civic education appeared evident in the experiences of all the participants.

One of the participants, when alluding to the curriculum, mentioned that while little had changed in the formal curriculum in the past few decades, greater emphasis was being placed on the development of critical thinking skills. This is a significant shift, because it encourages schools to create learning opportunities over and above the provision of knowledge prescribed by the formal curriculum and guided by the syllabus. This new trend actively seeks to provide schools with opportunities for learners and particularly adolescents to examine real-world challenges they encounter in their daily lives, in and beyond school critically. From the participants, it became apparent that Parkview High School had been encouraging the development of critical thinking by creating spaces in which the organised collective student voice could emerge. This corresponds with Barry et al.'s (2017) view that schools should be proactive in adopting more social and emotional avenues for learning.

These avenues at the school were visible in the response of the school to the increased public consciousness around the #metoo movement, gender-based violence, and gender and racial discrimination. Suri shared that the school had encouraged the learners to engage critically with these social issues by facilitating various seminars, talks, and community-based forums around these themes. As many of these areas deal with sensitive and often oppressive practices, they appear to elicit Freire's (2000) 'critical consciousness' in that they awaken learners and in doing so potentially influence action-driven pursuits against these social justice issues.

The aforementioned and the overall findings suggest that in creating opportunities for students to participate in various student voice opportunities, schools can achieve holistic educational aims beyond the quantitative markers suggested in the literature. Participants suggested that

achieving these kinds of holistic aims is not always possible when educational experiences differ too greatly from the reality of societal experiences. These views echo the critical need for cohesion between school and after-school environments (Biesta, 2009; Johnson et al., 2014).

Finding creative ways to bridge the gap between school-based education and real-life experiences remains a significant challenge, however. The findings suggest that the platforms introduced at Parkfield High School in the time leading up to and during the student mobilisation in 2016 were some of the ways in which this gap could be closed and learners could be prepared to "emerge into a bigger world" (Perry, line 2157). SVOs appear to provide a useful platform for training or equipping learners with effective communicative skills that can have a powerful influence on learners' ability to function adaptively in the world. In addition, communication skills are cited widely in the literature as a central component of influential learner-led movements.

The following section considers the aspects concerned with learner identity in challenging spaces. The potential role SVOs can play in this regard is also considered.

5.2.4 Forging identity through voice

As outlined in Chapter 2, adolescents occupy a stage of development characterised by what Erikson (1959) refers to as the identity vs role confusion crisis. This is a critical period for identity development and is influenced largely by the opportunities provided to adolescents in which they can exercise their autonomy and independence. Furthermore, Erikson (1971) notes the importance of encouragement and reinforcement during this period, two areas that are linked largely to their educational environments. The findings of the current research suggest that learner exposure to participate in various committees, forums, and discussion panels may have afforded them this opportunity. In addition, as the process unfolded, learners increasingly initiated these platforms for learners. While the learner-initiated action may be viewed as a move to transform the school culture into a more inclusive space, the participants were of the view that Parkfield High School strove to embody a culture of belonging in which everyone had a place. Therefore, while SVOs present a platform for education, they also seemingly create an environment in which learners can gain further insight about themselves and their place in the world. This corresponds with Marcia's concepts of identity formation characterised by exploration and commitment (Mancini et al., 2015; Marcia, 1980). The findings support the importance of affording learners ongoing opportunities to explore active engagement in school life. By doing this, it appears that learners are better positioned to question and grapple with

various identity alternatives before deciding about the values, beliefs, and goals they will pursue (Mancini et al., 2015). As social relations play a significant role in the aforementioned processes, SVOs appear well positioned to extend this learning. In other words, these forums appear to provide the means by which identity alternatives can be explored adequately and effectively.

This appears particularly true for learners from minority groups who otherwise may struggle to find their voices in spaces where they do not identify with the dominant narrative, a view which is supported in the literature (Rahman, 2013). An example that may point to this was the People of Colour Forum, which, while in its infancy, appeared to be developing in a space where learners of colour could freely express the unique challenges they encountered in the space. One of the participants believed that having this space in the school meant that learners could communicate, make sense of, and develop a narrative of their experiences in the school. This exercise in agency appeared to influence students' sense of efficacy in influencing the dominant culture.

The effectiveness of these forums was identified as something that needed to be monitored because of their potential to contribute to learner agency. Based on the outcomes or influence of these forums in contributing to the school culture, their implementation should be considered. From the findings, it appears that as long as the educators are willing to listen and engage, opportunities for learner empowerment and to drive change exist.

The various tiers of SVOs illustrated in Table 8 (p. 87) not only are a depiction of systemic processes but also illustrate the means to promote communication, dialogue, and identity formation in diverse school communities. These areas of human communication are pivotal to the exploration of how educators relate, respond and experience learners-led policy change.

5.2.5 Educators' role in mediating the emergence of the student voice

The findings suggest that the responsibility of facilitating SVOs rests primarily on educators, who are placed into positions of authority in the interests of and to guide learners. For the participants, one of the most challenging aspects of this process was managing the emergent power relations that at times appeared to challenge the traditional relationship between learners and educators. The participants identified this as a significant part of their experience during this time. The discussion that follows seeks to examine these experiences more closely.

The dominant view held by the participants was that schools and educators are responsible to ensure that students feel free to share their views and that these views receive respectful consideration. They believed that the age-old view that children be 'seen and not heard' was antiquated and were unanimous in their view that this was not conducive to the open communication and collaborative nature of education that Parkfield High School embraced. Blain was very vocal in his disapproval of an approach that failed to acknowledge the views of learners. He believed that this would undermine policies and practices in schools that were moving towards collaborative learning environments. These views are supported as a growing trend in the literature (Adams & Bell, 2016; Duffy et al., 2012; Musil, 2016; Cook-Sather, 2002).

However, despite consensus regarding the value of listening to learners, participants acknowledged the need to establish clear boundaries. There appeared to be uncertainty about how these should be negotiated. There was a level of concern about the measure to which learners should be allowed to speak to overall school policy. Tied to this were further concerns about creating an environment in which the learners felt entitled to or began to dictate policy. This concern is supported by Adams and Bell's (2016, p. 7) view that particular attention should be paid to the "social and affective dynamics between students and between students and faculty". However, this consciousness should not result in a tug of war between educators and learners; instead, these power relations need to be negotiated mindfully in the best interest of providing quality education.

While remaining mindful of the delicate balance, participants reiterated the importance of carefully monitoring power dynamics as they unfold. The participants were all able to acknowledge that some of the participants' colleagues held a sentiment, that the learners had shown signs of entitlement throughout the process that may have appeared confrontational. However, this was not the personal views of the participants. Rather, when speaking of their experience of shifting power dynamics, several believed that no genuine conflict between the student voice and educators had emerged. Furthermore, it was suggested that while robust discussion had been held, both parties had given input, and thus, neither detracted from the other. This highlighted an area of interest, as it appeared there was some debate about the origin of the perceived entitlement. Dom suggested that the relational challenges that had appeared were simply the manifestation of regular adolescent development rather than a newly formed sense of entitlement. Perry agreed but provided an alternative explanation for the perceived shift in power dynamics by arguing that certain educators' perceptions of learner entitlement

may be more indicative of that teacher's personal dispositions regarding the changes and perhaps even or her views of learner protests beyond the school, such as those seen in the #Feesmustfall movement at the time.

If this is indeed accurate, it appears to reflect the challenges outlined by Cook-Sather (2006), which suggest that educators' preconceived ideas about learner perspectives have the potential to become barriers that could hinder the authorisation of learners' perspectives. Furthermore, as alluded to in 4.3.1.3, unwillingness to engage with learners can hinder transformation that is required to create a school as a place of belonging for all learners.

5.3 Limitations of the Research

As with all research, degrees of limitation exist. One such limitation is that the research focussed only on the lived experiences of the teachers. The perceptions and experiences of the learners and parents may have added value to the study. This was, however, outside of the scope and extent of this research study. Future studies may wish to explore experiences of learners and parents in the process of learner-led policy change.

A further limitation presented in relation to participant diversity. While great effort was made to address gender diversity, racial diversity was a greater challenge to achieve perhaps owing to fewer people of colour employed at the research site. Prospective researchers may wish to consider how to address this when planning their research. Increasing the racial and cultural diversity of the population group will add depth, value and insights that would likely be unattainable with more homogenous population groups.

On a more personal note, I had to reflect consistently and critically on my role and acknowledge to minimise the influence of my personal bias throughout the process. Having been employed at the research site previously, there initially were some challenges in laying aside personal opinion. To mitigate this, I held regular consultations with my supervisor, worked closely with the transcriptions, and made every effort to ensure that the participants' words were used in the correct context as best determined by my interpretation, and I am confident that I have limited my influence on the research process. In addition, continual reflection of the literature and a rigorous commitment to the methods outlined in 3.8.2 have assisted me in portraying the research data accurately.

5.4 Recommendations

As the literature pertaining to educators' experiences of learner-led policy change is limited, it is recommended that more research be conducted. As alluded to during this research study, education systems are microcosms of the societies in which they are located. This suggests a great diversity of schooling systems exists and thus necessitates research both locally and globally that endeavours to explore this diversity.

In a local context, former Model C schools appear to be a hotbed of political activity due to the need and sometimes reluctance for transformation to occur. Regardless of this, all schools can benefit from a deeper understanding of SVOs and how educators experience them. The findings of the study suggest that SVO's have the ability to empower members of the learner body who may not ordinarily have the platforms in which to express their voice. They serve as a source of democratic and civil education that contributes to a critically minded and functional member of society and in a country where inequality is rife they have the ability to encourage dialogue in an interest of moving towards spaces where all learners find a sense of belonging.

While this study chose to explore educators, additional studies may wish to explore the experiences of management and/or the governing body. Furthermore, investigations into the experiences of students may bring about some insights that may add value to the conversation and provide a more holistic view of the matter.

In terms of participant input, the following brief collection of recommendations was offered:

Several participants suggested improved training to assist educators to facilitate discussions around sensitive topics with learners in the classroom. In addition, while the level of communication between management and staff was generally applauded, there were also calls for alternative avenues of communication to ensure that all staff members feel comfortable to have a voice, even if not in a public forum.

The theme of educator wellness was a challenge for the participants to grapple with. Several participants believed management needed to address educators' concerns regarding workload to ensure longevity and vitality in their teaching careers. The findings suggest that pressure on educators at former Model C schools occur due, in part, to the school's desire to uphold standards, continually expand on its services and facilities as well as attracting new learners. An exploration of these themes may provide an avenue for further research.

Finally, the participants shared a common sense of pride in the platforms developed by learners and supported by the educators of Parkfield High School. Several of the educators believed it was a matter of importance that other institutes consider how learners are provided similar spaces in which they are able to express their voice constructively and supportively.

5.5 Conclusion

This study has attempted to give a voice to educators who are on the frontlines of learner-led movements for change. It is hoped that the discussions have contributed to the currently limited body of knowledge regarding educators' experiences of learner-led policy change in the South African context. Furthermore, I have endeavoured to portray the data in an accurate and sensitive light to strengthen trustworthiness while reducing potential harm to the participants.

Transformation in its various forms will continue to be a topic of relevance and importance for decades to come with the youth of this country its biggest champions. While this should be celebrated, it comes with a cautionary disclaimer, namely that failure to prepare learners for active, constructive, and balanced activism will only hinder the progress of the contentious issues they seek to address. This study outlines one school's educators and their attempt to embrace change by working alongside the learner body. For this reason, it is imperative that further research be done to better understand the process in multiple educational institutions in different contexts.

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Appendix A: Individual Interview Transcript Example

Key

School name (pseudonym) : Parklands

Participant : Andy

Interviewer : DW

Interview 2

DW: Yeah, that makes perfect sense. So the changes that happened at Parkfield; could you identify or share or elaborate on any of the ways in which these changes occur?

Andy: Well, I wasn't necessarily all that informed about exactly how it came about, but I know there was an initial group of students who lead it or started it or started talking about it or whatever, and I think they then sort of found the proper channels to bring forth suggestions or changes and they set up a memorandum of 'demands' and yeah, and then I guess it went from there.

DW: But when you say the word 'demands', that's not ideal right?

Andy: No (laughs), that wasn't the ideal and we all had a little chuckle at this memorandum of 'demands' because that's literally what they, the students, called it. I wasn't necessarily against the changes, but I always felt that sort of attitude I wasn't necessarily comfortable with; you know, kids 'demanding' things. Asking for things, sure, demanding things is something else.

DW: It kind of links into that notion of entitlement.

Andy: Exactly! Which is a problem at the school, specifically. I think often the way the school changes things feeds into that, but again there are positives and negatives to it.

DW: Agreed.

Andy: I think a negative is the kids are perhaps, well this could be a positive and a negative thing, but they feel empowered, but perhaps a little bit too much so.

DW: Ok, I'm going to hold you there, because these are all wonderful points and we're going to get to them in a moment.

Andy: Cool! (both laugh)

DW: But ok, so I just want to make sure that I understand; so we're talking about a group of students who had ideas, who formulated those ideas but maybe didn't do it in the most correct manner, or the most efficient manner but nonetheless they put this together. And then, my understanding is that of course there are a number of mechanisms like Grade and School Council…

Andy: That it had to pass, yeah.

DW: That it had to pass through. So, do you think that things like Grade and School Council play an important role in schools?

Andy: In schools in general, it depends on how they are used, because when I started at Parkfield I don't think the Grade and School councils were used necessarily as effectively as they should have or, sort of, the role that they were meant to play; they didn't. It was very much more an informative kind of thing, like a normal school assembly, but it was just now smaller groups.

DW: Ok, what changed?

Andy: It changed in a sense that it was opened up to debate.

DW: Ah, ok.

Andy: So in other words, in a Grade assembly a Grade Head would always ask, "Are there any questions or any comments on this?" And then the kids are welcome to highlight issues that are problematic to them, which can range from the amount of assessments they're having at the moment, to race issues. So there's an opportunity for them to voice their opinion.

DW: You said this is in Grade Assembly?

Andy: Grade Assembly, yeah.

DW; Ok, so the Grade Head has to tackle that then and there, if they're going to ask those questions?

Andy: Yes, and the reason why it's discussed in the Grade assemblies is if something is put strong enough through by the Grade Head, it will go to Grade Council and School Council and then it will get discussed in the higher, sort of, structures. So I think that progressed quite a bit since I've been here; it's more of a voice for the kids to give their input and their ideas, rather than us telling them what they should be doing. We obviously still give them, "Ok, you must still prepare for exams," and you know, the normal things but there's now just a time set out for them to also have their opinions during these types of meetings.

DW: Is it inclusive to everyone?

Andy: Yes, so any agenda… as far as I understand it there are Grade councils that happen every term, and every class, during class-teacher lesson, can bring up stuff for the agenda for Grade Council. There's also pre-Grade council, where anybody that has big issues can go and discuss and it can be debated, whether we want to take it to Grade Council of not. And then at the Grade assemblies we usually get feedback on the Grade Council's discussion, and also School Council discussion if those issues went through to School Council from the Grade assemblies or the Grade councils.

DW: Ok, now I'm thinking to myself, I think some teachers might be really well-equipped to be able to have these kinds of conversations in a class-teacher period; maybe if it's something like, you know, we've got too many assessments in a week, any teacher could probably counter that, but if a child was to raise something important, you mentioned race for example, that's quite a sensitive subject, particularly in the South Africa context; do you think that class teachers are equipped to be able to have these conversations?

Andy: Well, I think it's not a skill that's taught to teachers in general; we get taught to be sensitive to all races and inclusive in our classrooms, but they never tell us how to discuss these kinds of things with the kids.

DW: You have to facilitate something…

Andy: You have to sometimes facilitate very sensitive conversations. Now me personally, I try to steer away from it, so I will rather try and avoid it and tell them to go to pre-Grade Council where there would be Grade representatives present to facilitate the conversation, rather than me doing it in my register class.

DW: Ok.

Andy: And that tends to work out fairly well; I mean it's not that I would shout it down, it would just be, "Ok, you've made your point, you've made your point; let's discuss it further, this is not the correct place to discuss this in full because it's only one class, maybe take it to pre-Grade council", but I tend to avoid it and I don't think that we are set up in a way to facilitate it. I think you must have the personality for it; because I'm teaching science, I'm more of a practical person, I'm here to teach you science, I'm not here to…

DW: More quantitative than qualitative.

Andy: Yes exactly! (DW laughs) So it's something that's difficult for me to do, and I tend to try to avoid it and move it to a platform where there's a specific platform to do that.

DW: Are you happy with being able to refer it to the Grade Council, or do you think the school should do more to try and equip you with more skills in this area?

Andy: I think a bit of both, because personally I don't think these discussions should happen informally, well up to a point, in just a class, simply because I think a lot of stuff could be said or could be misinterpreted that can cause a lot of problems and if you don't have someone that can facilitate it properly it can spin wildly out of control. So, I mean, it's not that I don't want to discuss anything race-related or whatever; you get a feeling where you know this is getting too much, let's rather not. So I think it must be a good skill to have to facilitate that kind of conversation, I don't think it's needed that I necessarily have it, because there are those platforms that I can refer the kids to.

DW: And it's maybe sometimes safer to be able to actually refer it on.

Andy: Indeed, because then everything is minuted, you know, sort of a more, hate this word, safer space to discuss these things.

DW: Ok, so here's another question then; do you think it is the responsibility of schools to be able to provide these kinds of spaces for kids?

Andy: No and yes?

DW: Ok.

Andy: I mean, that depends on how you see the school within the community. Again, being a science person, I'm like, "I'm here to teach the kids, give them an education so that they can do whatever they want to do one day," but obviously I also know that's not all a child needs in order to become a proper, functioning human being… can you repeat your question again? I think I just went off topic here.

Appendix B: Focus Group Transcript Example

Key

School name (pseudonym) : Parklands

Participant: : Blain, Dom, Perry, Jaidyn, Suri, Andy

Interviewer : DW

DW: Alright so firstly, obviously thank you very much not only for coming today, but for sitting with me one-on-one and having that chat with me. I learned a lot from having conversations with you and I feel like you all gave some insight that I would have otherwise not have thought of. So what I did was, after transcribing all of the interviews, I picked up some themes that I thought were prevalent and then I've tried to ask some questions around those themes. So saying that, also just a reminder that of course this space is very confidential still, so whatever is said in this room needs to stay in this room please. So, yes, there are probably going to be some conflicting ideas; I was hoping for that, and I think that there will be, but remember that we're not necessarily here to debate or argue, it's simply to hear out each others' views, and perhaps offer an alternative view, but not in a conflict-oriented way, and then yeah, just grab your eats while we go along.

Alright so I've kind of broken it up into what I consider to be four themes, and I'd like to start off with what I'm calling "Youthful Power"; so I think that for the students being able to influence policy and exercise their voice, must have felt like a real social justice win, and I think that it may even have made some headmasters from yester-year turn in their graves. Conventional wisdom tells us that children should be seen and not heard, and I wonder, however, what place, if any at all, this line of thinking has in Parkfield. So feel free if anyone wants to open that up.

Dom: Just so I understand, you say the conventional way of thinking has a place at Parkfield?

DW: I'm saying does it have a place at Parkfield, yeah.

Blain: I wonder how that relates to some of the things that we've been speaking about recently, about to what extent do you give children the voice, and at what point does it become too much, I guess in some way, that suddenly kids are dictating school policy. Of course, I don't think keeping kids quiet, you know 'seen and not heard', I don't think that's a very good policy at all; I don't think that makes for a very conducive education environment, but also where do you,

then, draw the line, you know? If you keep giving, giving, giving… where is that happy medium between hearing what they have to say, but then also being the adult in the room?

DW: Where does that come from? Because you said now that it's something that you've been speaking about a bit lately.

Blain: Well I think there's been some of the stuff that's been going on now with, for example, I think I can use the word 'gender-neutral pronouns', so the Head Prefects now, for example, are called the 'Head Prefects', not the 'Head Boy' or the 'Head Girl'.

Suri: As of a week ago.

Blain: Yeah, and…

DW: Is that from their… they wanted that?

Blain: Yeah, a lot of it is driven by them. Also, there's been an item raised at School Council where… do we choose 10 boys and 10 girls for prefects or do we just choose the 20 best? Does it become not related to any gender at all? And I know some of us of an older generation, me included, if we refer to, say for example, the Head Girl as a 'her', or somebody as a 'him', one or two of them have actually corrected an adult in the room. So... do you know what I mean?

DW: It's quite fascinating.

Blain: Where is that boundary?

DW: I think it's quite interesting, so in an effort to actually be gender-equal, in some senses they interpret it as being sexist?

Blain: Yeah, or…

DW: In terms of the prefects. They'd rather have the 20 top… students feel that way, they'd rather have the 20 top?

Blain: Yeah.

Suri: No, it's just a debate isn't it? It's just a question.

Blain: It was… it's just a question, yeah.

DW: Ok.

Blain: So, to what extent do we not force kids to apply to be a prefect under the banner of being a boy or a girl? What happens if you are non-binary? Where do you apply? Or whatever the case

may be. Do you know what I mean? So, that whole debate is driven a lot by the kids, but then the question then becomes, well, is there a line and does it become that kids now start dictating school policy, and where is that line?

DW: And is it a line that's been drawn recently, that anyone has had a personal experience?

Jaidyn: Can I ask something there, in terms of some students questioning their pronouns, being addressed with a certain pronoun; was it students who do not necessarily identify as not their sexually-assigned role, or are they some students who don't want to be called 'him' or 'her', not even saying that we are…

Suri: But we've only been told that about specific individuals.

Blain: No, I think we've been told…

Suri: It hasn't been addressed to the whole school.

Perry: Not specific individuals.

Suri: Only one individual in the school do we have to use 'they' and 'their', as far as I know.

Blain: Who is that?

Suri: The person who is now called… she's in Grade 8, she…

Perry: Charlie.

Blain: Ok.

Suri: Yes, and Subage and the other one's name..

Blain: And Subage.

Suri: But nobody's told us that.

Andy: Haven't they?

Suri: No!

Dom: No, I think they haven't, yeah.

Suri: Nobody's told us that.

Blain: I know Subage…

Suri: We got told we must call them ‘Head Prefects’, but we didn’t get told that we can’t use a pronoun for her.

Perry: Yeah, I didn’t know that.

Blain: Yeah, I think she’s come to specific people to tell that, but I don’t think that’s been very public.

Suri: Yeah, I mean really, I…

Blain: But anyway… yeah…

Suri: I find it all incredibly frustrating.

DW: Why do you find it incredibly frustrating?

Suri: Just, yeah, because I’m the more conservative person; I just find it incredibly frustrating. I think the whole of nature exists in two roles; in male and female roles, and we are part of that, and I don’t care what people do with their time, what they do with their love life, what they do with their friendships, but why must we complicate everything is how I feel, and I know that’s a very unpopular feeling, and I’ll be judged for it, but you wanted some variety of personnel on this panel, and so here you have one. I just think it’s really… because ‘they’ and ‘their’ is not a singular word in English, you know, English doesn’t provide for this. Many languages, everything functions in male and female, even tables are female and chairs are male, so where…

Blain: What in French for example? They are male.

Suri: Where is French going to go? You know, I just think we are creating more problems for ourselves. Obviously, I know that other people feel we are solving problems for people who have problems, so I have to go with it, but I just find it incredibly frustrating, because I just think we are made in two forms. We are made in two forms; biologically, we are made in two forms and I don’t care what people want to do with friendships or anything else, but I just think this is pushing boundaries that don’t need to be pushed. Yeah, I know when Doctor van Wyk came and spoke to us, I found that very enlightening and fine, and I understood that we can’t wait until they’re 18, which would have been my position before; I would have said just let people wait until they’re 18 to make these huge decisions about their lives, so I understood what he said, but it’s… I don’t know… it’s very difficult for me. That’s all I’m saying, and now I must walk around on tent hooks, not knowing what I can say to whom, and then called out for being this-that… you know, I get called things now, because I make a mistake and call somebody a gender that I didn’t realise that they weren’t.

Appendix C: Coding Example

CODING NODE SUMMARY

Nodes

Name	Files	References
working with teenagers	2	14
guiding teenagers	2	21
teacher wellness	2	19
disempowered teachers	2	6
teacher voice	1	29
teacher student power dynamics	2	18
student voice opportunity	1	20
student voice identity	2	21
school responsibility	1	11
how much space should students receive	2	7
political influence	1	3
transformation	1	14
positive democracy	2	14
model c	2	7
civic education	2	31
when CE goes wrong	1	4
ideal learning	1	1
covert curriculum	1	7

Coding Summary Report

Project: Teachers' experiences of learner-led policy change

Generated: 2020/01/13 08:54 PM

Thesis - Transcript - Interview 2

Total References 17 Nodes

Node Coding Teacher-Learner power dynamics

References

REF NO.	COVERAGE	CONTENT
1	0.22%	Ok, yes we're willing to listen to certain things; that makes sense, that's good, no, not to others... I think there must be a partnership, there has to be a partnership, and I think that partnership is quite difficult. We can't always share information with kids, and often by withholding information that we can't share, there's a little bit of a lack of trust I guess in some ways, and it's a little bit of a disconnect, which is quite tricky sometimes.
2	0.07%	For sure. So here there seems as though there's a willingness, as we said earlier, there's a willingness from both sides to meet half-way.
3	0.18%	Yeah, and I think it's really important that the kids can see via the uniform change, via the IT change, that we do listen to what they have to say. And if we do say yes to some things, then it makes it, not easier, but more understandable why we say no to some things. We don't just willy-nilly chuck things out, no we listen, that makes sense, that's good, let's do it.
4	0.22%	Yeah, so they got to a point where the kids had brought a proposal two or three times, it had been turned down, but the arguments were flimsy, and there's one thing that I can say for teenagers, especially teenagers at this school, is that they can smell the bullshit, because I smelt it! I was like, "Really?" "That's our arguments?" " That's not a good argument," and if we don't have a good argument, then surely we should be considering what they say.
5	0.13%	You could see the power-relations between teachers and students, but did that spill into the classrooms or was that more just a general feeling? KC: No, not really; just a general feeling. Although no maybe it spilled into the classrooms… I don't think so.
6	0.25%	Kids drove the process. So the kids started it and I think because of the way that they presented themselves, Management felt that we

		could meet them halfway. And we also felt that they had bought in to the process so much and been part of it so much that they weren't going to let us down, you know, by wearing hair loose and being scruffy and all the rest but in other words, sort of playing in to what a lot of the public thought, you know; that we would just immediately go down and that discipline would be an issue.
7	0.13%	I think if it did, it was a positive impact. I think the pupils saw that they could trust Management, and trust that we would move things forward. And I think Management also saw that pupils were actually quite light and respectful about the whole process.
8	0.35%	think (pause) I do believe that the process has created a positive relationship with people outside the classroom. I do though think that some teachers feel that the kids are entitled; that the kids demand and Management gives. But I don't believe that's true. I can see why that might be the perception of some teachers, where they think its just want and get, but I don't think that's the case. I think where we have made changes, Management has been happy to do so. We haven't been, sort of, under siege to just go along with what the kids want, but I do think there's more and more of a perception that kids are entitled, but I don't think it relates directly to the policy change, if that makes sense.
9	0.14%	Parkfield is really progressive and takes a whole bunch of stuff into account and makes room for everybody and will adjust if times are changing. It's not like the school I was in where things were rigid, you know, "This this this and this," and there's no budging in any kind of way.
10	0.14%	but I think there was a bit of a feeling of 'us vs. them' in the greater school community; that the kids were asking for a lot and not willing to give, that kind of a vibe from the teachers, and I'm assuming the same from the students who probably had the same perspective from their side;
11	0.17%	that we were always just asking them to do certain things and we never gave in on anything. So there was definitely an 'us vs. them' feeling, but I think the school did actually quite well in addressing that and not letting that get out of hand; that it's a sort of uprising thing and that there's a big negativeness between the two groups.
12	0.15%	There's a difference between listening to someone's opinion, and really taking it to heart. I'm not saying that the wrong decision was made, not at all. I'm just saying that I think the input of the learners was weighted more than the input of the teachers, if that sort of summarises what I'm trying to say here.
13	0.41%	Ok, well I'm glad that you've said that, because if that didn't sit well with some of the teachers, do you think that may have had an impact on how they relate to the kids? Not necessarily in the classroom, but in general. JG: Definitely, I think so, because if something like that happens and you feel that all these demands are being entertained, and

		whatever, and they say what we must do it's like, "Jump!" And we say, "How high?" That kind of vibe, then smaller things become bigger; so maybe a kid eats in your class and then you're like, "Ugh, these kids are so entitled look this kid is just eating in the class, they just do what they…" you know, so it sort of aggravates the normal stuff that the kids would do. If there's that attitude of 'the kids are so entitled', then everything kids do you're going to see as them being entitled.
14	0.19%	I think it's a bit of both; I think at times when it was really happening, it was a bit distracting for some of the students, at a time, but now that it's continued on, it's become more and more the norm; it has not become as distracting. I think it is just the nature of communication that has evolved from it which is far more comfortable, so I don't find it too distracting at all.
15	0.19%	There I think, a lot of them felt challenged by the students, and they were being undermined in their authoritative position, and I think that came through in some frustration that they felt that their voice was being overburdened or overwhelmed by the students and some of the staff who were in favour of this, and it came forward, but I don't think that they were not listened to.
16	0.21%	Yeah, they're a slightly important part of the school (both laugh). So to me, it seems sort of obvious that they must have representation; that their ideas, their opinions must be heard, incorporated, thought about. That doesn't mean that every desire must be acquiesced to or whatever, but it must be heard and it must be taken on board and addressed, even if it is to say, "Well, we won't do that and this is why we won't do that."
17	0.16%	Could it be an 'us vs. you' kind of thing? ZG: I think there was some of that, and again I think that varied a lot from teacher to teacher based on a variety of personal dispositions, I guess. I'm sure also how teachers felt about things like 'Rhodes Must Fall' and 'Fees Must Fall' and what was happening elsewhere…

Appendix D: Permission Letter from School

Please note all potential identifiers have been removed.

HIGH SCHOOL

Rondebosch 7700 South Africa
Tel (021) • Fax (021)
admin@ l.co.za
www.v l.co.za

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RESEARCH STUDY – MR D. WILLIAMS

We hereby confirm that Mr D. Williams has permission to conduct research study with Educators at High School, willing to participate, on a voluntary basis.

Yours faithfully

Mr
PRINCIPAL

Appendix E: Western Cape Clearance to Conduct Research in a Public School

Directorate: Research

Audrey.wyngaard2@pgwc.gov.za
tel: +27 021 467 9272
Fax: 0865902282
Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000
wced.wcape.gov.za

APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS WITHIN THE WESTERN CAPE

Note

- This application has been designed with students in mind.
- If a question does not apply to you indicate with a N/A
- The information is stored in our database to keep track of all studies that have been conducted on the WCED. It is therefore important to provide as much information as is possible

1 APPLICANT INFORMATION

1.1 Personal Details		
1.1.1	Title (Prof / Dr / Mr/ Mrs/Ms)	**Mr**
1.1.2	Surname	**Williams**
1.1.3	Name (s)	**Dayne**
1.1.4	Student Number (If applicable)	**20829108**

1.2 Contact Details		
1.2.1	Postal Address	**31 Smith Road, Plumstead**
1.2.2	Telephone number	**0765074316**
1.2.3	Cell number	**See above**
1.2.4	Fax number	
1.2.5	E-mail Address	**daynewill@gmail.com**
1.2.6	Year of registration	**2017**
1.2.7	Year of completion	**2019**

2 DETAILS OF THE STUDY

2.1 Details of the degree or project		
2.1.1	Name of the institution	Stellenbosch University
2.1.2	Degree / Qualification registered for	Master's in Education (Educational Psychology)
2.1.3	Faculty and Discipline / Area of study	Educational Psychology
2.1.4	Name of Supervisor / Promoter / Project leader	Dr Lynne Damons
2.1.5	Telephone number of Supervisor / Promoter	021 808 2313
2.1.6	E-mail address of Supervisor / Promoter	ldamons@sun.ac.za

2.1.7	**Title of the study** Educators' experiences of learner involvement in transforming traditional school policies and practices at a former Model C school.
2.1.8	**What is the research question, aim and objectives of the study**

The research focus of this study is to explore and describe how the educators in a former 'model C' school experienced the student-led policy changes that resulted in the reformation of school rules. This study is of the view that by creating a space for these experiences to be shared, we may glean an insight into the effectiveness, viability and sustainability of the mechanisms used to navigate the transformation of traditional school policies.

To this end the study will be guided by the following research question: *How the educators' at the school experienced the students' involvement in changing the school's policies and practices?*

The following sub-questions will be used to guide the exploration of educators' experiences and perceptions.

- *How was the emergent student voice initially experienced by educators?*
- *What role did educators play in managing student activism?*

- *Do educators feel that their voice was fully acknowledged in the policy changes that were eventually adopted?*
- *What effect did the policy changes have on Teaching and Learning (TAL)?*
- *What effect did the policy changes have on educator-student relations?*
- *Having gone through this experience at their school, what are educators' views on their responsibility to provide spaces in which the student voice is heard?*

This study will reflect on the experiences of the educators who were employed at Parkfield High School during 2016 to 2017. During this time the school underwent a process of policy review resulting in the adoption of new policies with regards to hair, uniform and jewellery policies. Whilst these may appear superficial these are highly contentious and politicized issues closely related to creating inclusive spaces that acknowledge diverse socio-cultural practices. It is important to note that these specific policies are not the focus of the study but rather stand as an example of student-led policy change and educators response to this. Furthermore, the process and eventual institutional policy shifts were well-publicized. (Qukula, 2016; Goba, 2017).

This study thus seeks to explore that process from the vantage point of the educators whom are at the helm of the daily running of schools, it is however important to note that this study will not directly include the views, opinions and experiences of the learners, parents or the governing body

Please note: That ethical clearance will be obtained from Stellenbosch Research and Ethics committee before the research commences.

2.1.9	**Name (s) of education institutions (schools)**
Parkfield High School (Pseudonym)	

2.1.10	**Research period in education institutions (Schools)**	
2.1.11	Start date	15/05/2019
2.1.12	End date	30/05/2019

Appendix F: Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Education Research Ethical Clearance Form

UNIVERSITEIT STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

NOTICE OF APPROVAL

REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form

25 June 2019

Project number: 9385

Project Title: Educators' experiences of learner involvement in transforming traditional school policies and practices at an ex-Model C school.

Dear Mr Dayne Williams

Your REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form submitted on 22 May 2019 was reviewed and approved by the REC: Humanities.

Please note the following for your approved submission:

Ethics approval period:

Protocol approval date (Humanities)	Protocol expiration date (Humanities)
25 June 2019	24 June 2022

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: Humanities, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.

Please use your SU project number (9385) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

FOR CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

Please note that a progress report should be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee: Humanities before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary)

Included Documents:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Informed Consent Form	consent form for participants Latest	20/03/2019	1
Data collection tool	Interview guide Latest	20/03/2019	1
Proof of permission	Research approval letter	20/03/2019	
Data collection tool	FGD_Guide	03/04/2019	1
Proof of permission	Research approval letter	03/04/2019	1
Proof of permission	permission from Westerford	03/04/2019	1
Default	Lynne Damons CV 2018	04/04/2019	1
Default	changes letter	26/04/2019	1
Research Protocol/Proposal	Proposal	26/04/2019	2
Informed Consent Form	consent form for participants Latest (1)	14/05/2019	2

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at cgraham@sun.ac.za.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number: REC-050411-032.
The Research Ethics Committee: Humanities complies with the SA National Health Act No.61 2003 as it pertains to health research. In addition, this committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research established by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Department of Health Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes (2nd Ed.) 2015. Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

Appendix G: Consent Form and Information Brochure

UNIVERSITEIT•STELLENBOSCH•UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are invited to take part in a study conducted by Dayne Williams (BA [UNISA]), B.Ed Honours [UWC]), (PGCE [UCT]), A Masters in Educational Psychology student, from the Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University.

As a partial requirement of this Master's degree in Educational Psychology, a research projects needs to be completed in the form of a thesis. You are invited to participate in the research project entitled: **Educators' experiences of student involvement in changing traditional school policies and practices at an ex-Model C school**.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are an educator who has been employed at Parkfield High School since at least 2016. More specifically, you were employed during the hair, uniform and jewellery policy shifts between 2016 and 2017. Thus your perspectives and experiences of these shifts in policy and their implications on the students and educators are important for this research which attempts to explore various questions pertaining to this process.

The information presented here will explain the details of this project. You may contact the researcher if you require further explanation or clarification of any aspect of the study.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of educators in the wake of the student-led policy changes that occurred between 2016 and 2017. It also aims to gain insight into the role schools play in providing platforms and structures that encourage learner activism.

2. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF ME?

If you volunteer to participate in this study the following will be asked of you:

- You will be asked to complete and sign this consent form
- You will be asked to participate in an individual interview concerning the theme identified above. This will take approximately 45 – 60 minutes.

- Subsequently, you will be given the opportunity to decide whether or not you would like to participate in a focus group discussion involving six to eight participants in discussion about various themes regarding education, student activism and learner-educator relations. The focus group will take approximately 60 - 90 minutes.

- The interviews and focus group will be conducted at times and locations convenient for you during May - June 2019.

- You will also be requested to indicate your availability to clarify or confirm information shared during the individual interview and/or focus group, via electronic correspondence or telephonically, should the need arise.

3. POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this research. However should you experience discomfort as a consequence of your participation in this study, I have arranged for Pete Farlam, a Clinical Psychologist based in Newlands, to be available to consult with you. Mr Farlam can be contacted on 0216591062.

4. POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO THE SOCIETY

This study hopes to create a space for teachers to share their experiences of a school's efforts to create schools as inclusive spaces. This study therefore has the potential to provide insights into the processes, successes and challenges that educators experience in creating school environments that embrace diversity and transformation.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Participants will not be paid for their participation in this study.

6. PROTECTION OF YOUR INFORMATION, CONFIDENTIALITY AND IDENTITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of coding procedures that will ensure that all participants remain anonymous throughout the process. This will be achieved through the use pseudonyms and the removal of identifiable information. All data will be encrypted and stored on a password secured PC with only the researcher having access to it. Raw data relevant to the study will only be shared with the supervisor working with the researcher on this study. Interviews will be audio-taped (with your permission) and you will have the right to review the transcripts and recordings that pertain to their participation in the study. The audio tapes will be kept on a password secured storage device to which only the researcher has access.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to participate in this study or not. If you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without any consequence. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this study should circumstances arise which warrant doing so. I will however discuss this with you before doing so.

8. RESEARCHER'S CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Mr Dayne Williams at 0765074316 and/or the supervisor, Dr Lynne Damon's at 021 808 2313

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT

As the participant I confirm that:

- I have read the above information and it is written in a language that I am comfortable with.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been answered.
- All issues related to privacy, and the confidentiality and use of the information I provide, have been explained.

By signing below, I _____ *(name of participant)* agree to take part in this research study, as conducted by Dayne Williams *(name of principal investigator).*

_____ _____

Signature of Participant **Date**

DECLARATION BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

As the **principal investigator,** I hereby declare that the information contained in this document has been thoroughly explained to the participant. I also declare that the participant has been encouraged (and has been given ample time) to ask any questions. In addition I would like to select the following option:

X	The conversation with the participant was conducted in a language in which the participant is fluent.
	The conversation with the participant was conducted with the assistance of a translator (who has signed a non-disclosure agreement), and this "Consent Form" is available to the participant in a language in which the participant is fluent.

_____ _____

Signature of Principal Investigator **Date**

Appendix H: Semi-structured Interview Guide

Interview schedule for semi-structured interviews

Overarching Research question:

- *How the educators' at the school experienced the learner's involvement in changing the school's policies and practices?*

Sub-questions:

- *How was the emergent learner voice initially experienced by educators?*
- *What role did educators play in managing learner activism?*
- *Do educators feel that their voice was fully acknowledged in the policy changes that were eventually adopted?*
- *What effect did the policy changes have on Teaching and Learning (TAL)?*
- *What effect did the policy changes have on educator- learner relations?*
- *Having gone through this experience at their school, what are educator's views on their responsibility to provide spaces in which the learner voice is heard?*

Contextual questions:

- If you were to give a brief overview of Parkfield, what do you think people should know about it?
- What about Parkfield would you choose to highlight if you were speaking to prospective learners?
- Can you comment on the view held by some, that Parkfield is a 'modern, progressive, 21st century school'. (What has informed or influenced your perception or view?)

Learner voices

- Could you identify/share/elaborate on the opportunities that provide students a space in which to raise, discuss or express their views on issues pertaining to them?

- In your opinion what purpose do structures/systems like these play in high schools such as Parkfield?

- Do you think schools have a responsibility to provide opportunities such as these? And if so what role do educators play in the process?

Policy shifts/transformation:

- In the time you have worked at the school, what have been some of the changes in policy that you have experienced? (In what ways has the school changed the way they view or do things during your time here?)

- The decision that the Parkfield SGB took to alter hair, uniform and jewellery polices in 2016 was widely published? What was the rationale behind this decision and who drove the process?

- Could you please recount as best you can the process that led to this policy change?

- These changes resulted in substantial media attention at the time. Can you recall any opinions that the public held in light of these changes?

Educator voices/experiences

- How would you describe the educator – learner relations during this time?
- To what extent was your voice as an educator acknowledged in the policy changes that were eventually adopted? (could you elaborate?)
- "At the same time that these policies were being implemented, students around the country were protesting the Rhodesmustfall and later feesmustfall movements. In addition other secondary schools such as Pretoria Girls High and San Souci were also in the news for rules and policies that were thought of as discriminatory."

  How do you think the political atmosphere at the time may have influenced Parkfield's views to review school's rules and policies?

Reflections

- It has now been three years since the policy changes. As you reflect how you do think this process may have influenced the relationships between teachers and learners outside the classroom? (or in general)

- In what ways do you think this policy change has had an influence on your teaching and/or the learning that takes place in your class?

- If you were invited to share your experiences with other schools what points would you feel would be important to share?

- *Optional: Could you discuss one positive and/or negative consequence as a result of these policy changes?*

[This schedule for the semi-structured interview provides a guide for a line of questioning. Yet, the interview is driven by the responses given by the participant. By using the responses given to initiate and continue conversation, the above areas of interest are incorporated in a sensitive, appropriate manner.]

Appendix I: Focus Group Discussion Guide

Focus Group discussion guide

Youthful power:

I would like us to start with the students. For them being able to influence policy and exercise their voice must feel like a real social justice win. It may even make headmasters from yesteryear turn in their graves. Conventional wisdom tells us that children should be seen and not heard.

- **I wonder however what place, if any at all, this line of thinking has at Parkfield?**

The words entitlement and power dynamics came up on several occasions. If we define this as the belief that one is inherently deserving of privileges or special treatment, then I wonder

- **Were the 2016 policy changes a reflection of democratic principles and deliberate social education or were they simply a bending to the will of newly empowered students?**
- **Some have suggested that the students were more demanding than engaging at first and that this may inadvertently have set a precedent for future interactions. Is this a fair analysis?**
- Adolescents can be very egocentric as they grow and development into adulthood. This may have the tendency to sway what they advocate for. On the one hand providng a platform for their voices may offer learning opportunity in which they see themselves as part of a greater community on the other hand, if left to their own devices it may reinforce the narrative of self before others.
- So my question is this: **What ways have you as individuals or collectively as a school found to help navigate the student voice?**
- **Adaptability:**

Parkfield has shown itself to be a school willing to evolve and adapt to the needs of current learners. The themes of progressive and proactive rather than traditional and reactive came up in conversation.

- **Is Parkfield really a progressive school?**
- **What have been some of the biggest hurdles and areas you feel need to be addressed in order to move away from the former model c school tag?**

From the teacher's perspective

What was clear from our conversations is that all relevant stakeholders were addressed in the policy changes. However, there was a feeling by several of you on both sides of the fence that decisions regarding gender neutrality and uniform were inevitable and the more conservative voice could feel alienated at times. In addition, it was acknowledged that the staffroom is not an easy place to express one's opinion particularly if it is in the minority.

- **Does this resonate with anyone? In what ways could this process be more inclusive?**
- **Some mentioned that the respect has remained for teachers but the gap between adult and child has closed. For example you are able to discuss issues with more vulnerability than previously. Do you agree with this and if so how have you experienced this? Has it added value to teacher-learner relations?**
- **As a follow up to the previous questions a few of you spoke about the role of facilitation in class. Some teachers enjoy an open dialogue others feel uncomfortable. While I understand there is no expectation to discuss issues in the classroom do you feel that given the sensitivity of many topics educators that do want to engage should be given guidance and/or training?**

Socially responsible learners

Phillip Jackson coined the term covert curriculum. As oppose to the overt curriculum or caps in our case the covert curriculum refers to the unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that students learn in school.

- **One might argue that Parkfield places an emphasis on this form of education. How or in what ways has student-led policies changes added to Parkfield's covert curriculum?**
- **Considering the high rate of teacher burn out particularly in high functioning schools such as Parkfield. Do you feel teacher loads and mental health are managed**

well in light of the added responsibility that extra and covert curricular learning activities bring to the table?

- **From the perspective of the school is the general feeling that teachers' voices carry the same weight as students?**

Thank you for your participation. Do you have any questions you would like to ask, or any other issues that you would like to discuss with us today?